COLLEGE FOOTBALL FANTASY FOOTBALL

Sporting News

SEE A DIFFERENT GAME

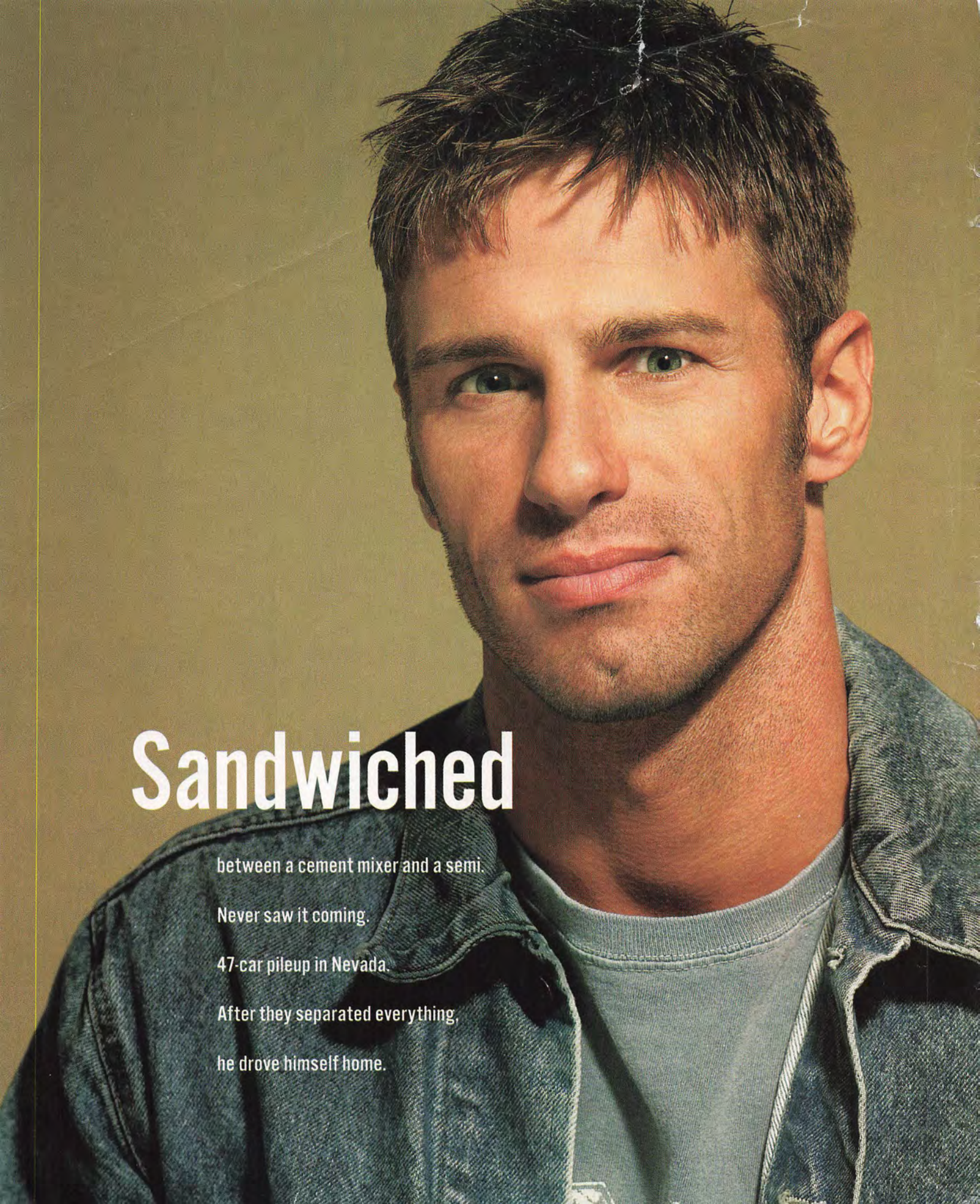
MLB PLAYOFF PREVIEW

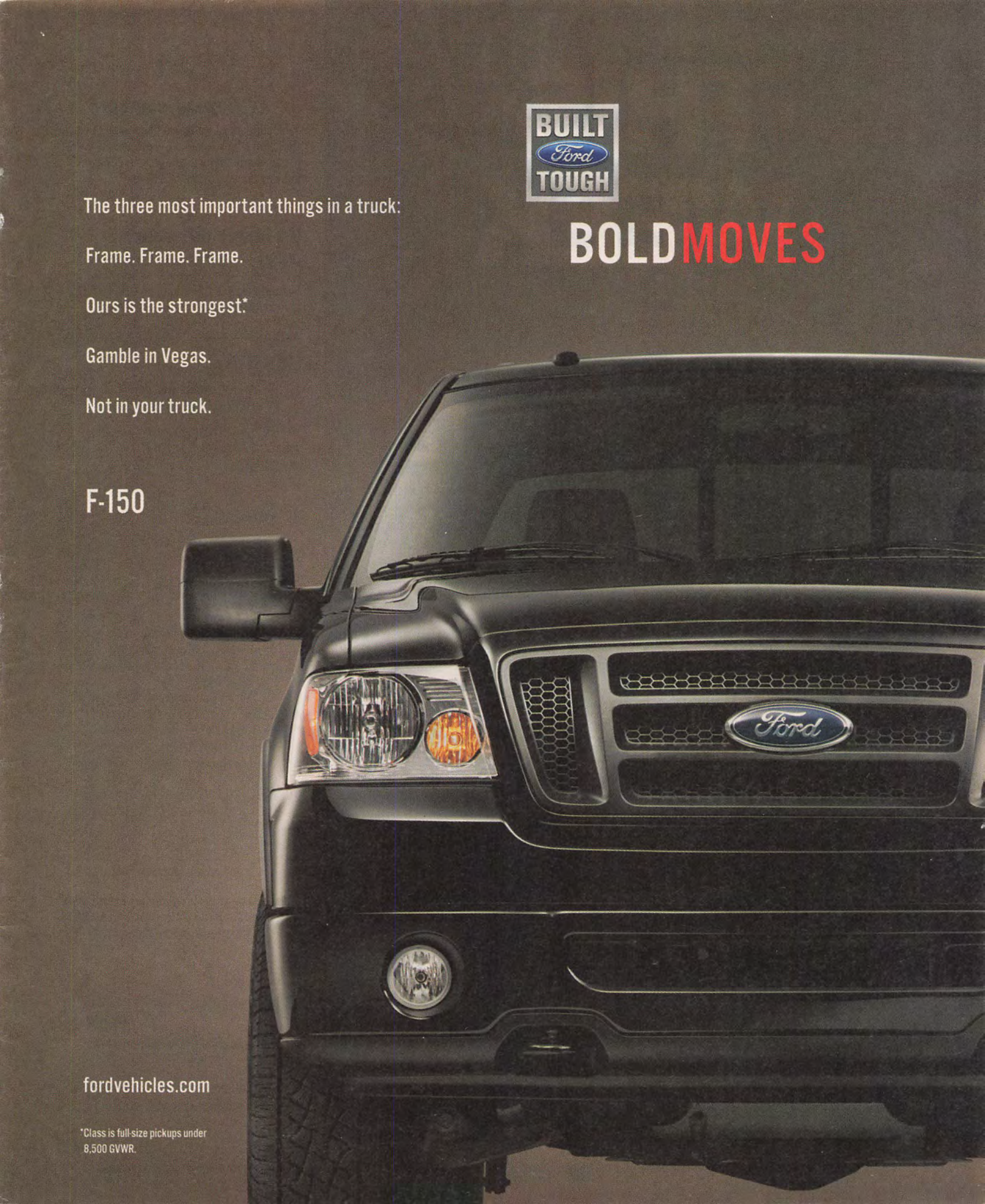
Mr. October

Why DEREK JETER is so crucial to the Yankees' World Series dreams

PLUS: Subway Series' other high-impact shortstop

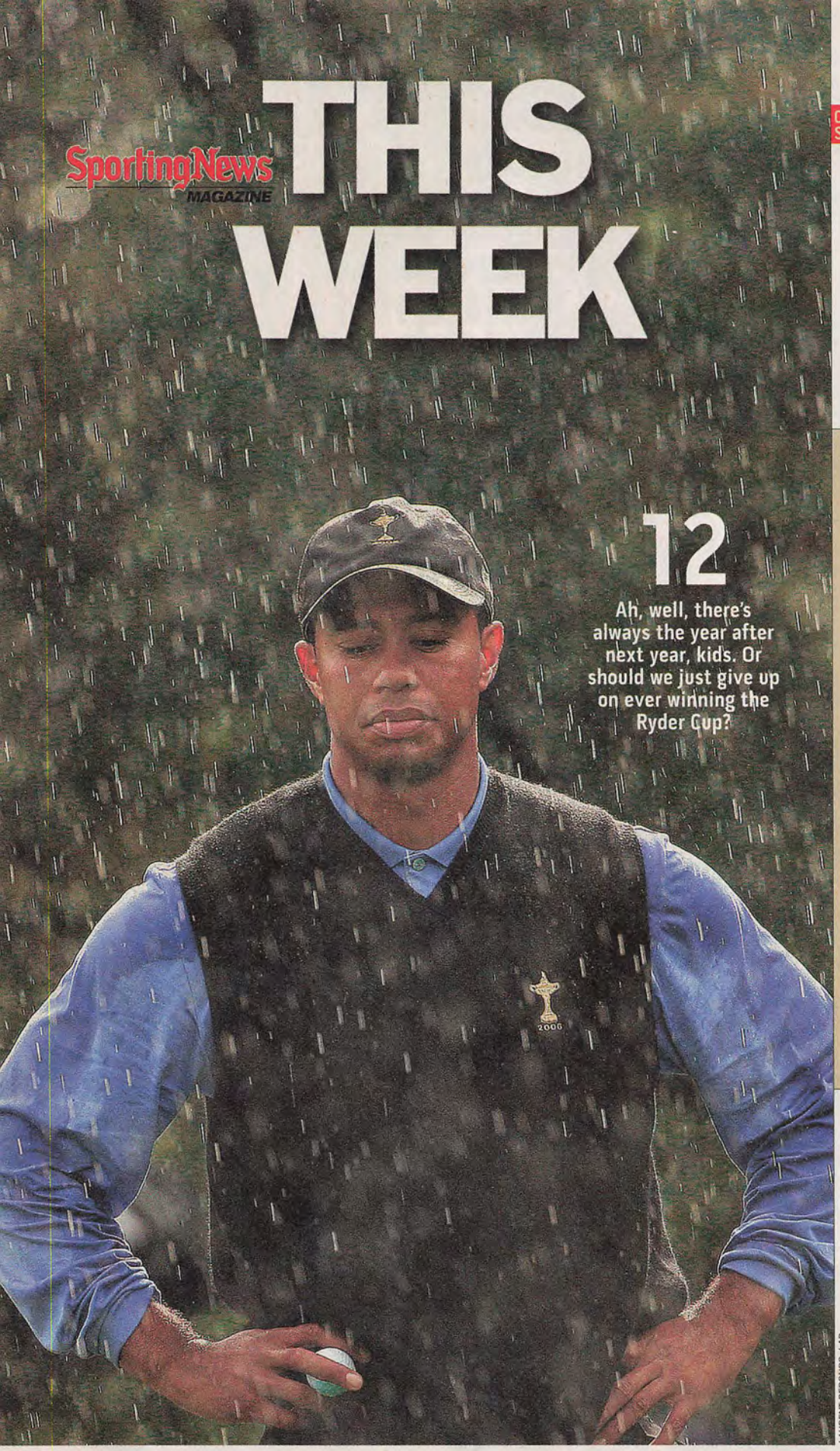
www.sportingnews.com October 6, 2006


Sandwiched
between a cement mixer and a semi.
Never saw it coming.
47-car pileup in Nevada.
After they separated everything,
he drove himself home.


BUILT Ford TOUGH
BOLDMOVES
The three most important things in a truck:
Frame. Frame. Frame.
Ours is the strongest.*
Gamble in Vegas.
Not in your truck.
F-150
fordvehicles.com
*Class is full-size pickups under 8,500 GVWR.

SportingNews MAGAZINE

THIS WEEK



LAURENT REBOURS / AP

12

Ah, well, there's always the year after next year, kids. Or should we just give up on ever winning the Ryder Cup?

COVER STORY > BASEBALL PLAYOFF PREVIEW

14 Beyond compare

Mets shortstop Jose Reyes has tools—Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter has hardware. Fans will get to see the difference up close during a Subway Series. *By Sean Deveney*

> COLLEGE FOOTBALL

24 Miner difference

UTEP's Jordan Palmer isn't as good as his brother—yet—but he is the best non-BCS quarterback, and that's enough to keep NFL eyes focused on him. *By Tom Dienhart*

INSIDER

28 NFL+Fantasy Source
42 COLLEGE FOOTBALL
45 NASCAR
54 BASEBALL
58 NBA
59 COLLEGE BASKETBALL
+
60 **DAVE KINDRED** Ryan Howard is a slugger worth snuggling.

KNOW IT ALL

6 **To Know List** Last year's World Series teams have some offseason work to do.
8 **On Deck** Sports' best month gets started with a pretty darn good week. Plus, **Starting 5**.
9 **My Turn** Tricia Garner shoots to thrill at a Rock, Paper, Scissors tournament.
10 **Your Turn** The Subway Series hasn't started yet and you're already booing.
11 **Cutting the cord** Get your video game fix without the wires.
12 **Ryder Cup** When it comes to golf, the U.S. isn't fit to hold Europe's putter.

COVER: BY JIM McISAAC/GETTY IMAGES

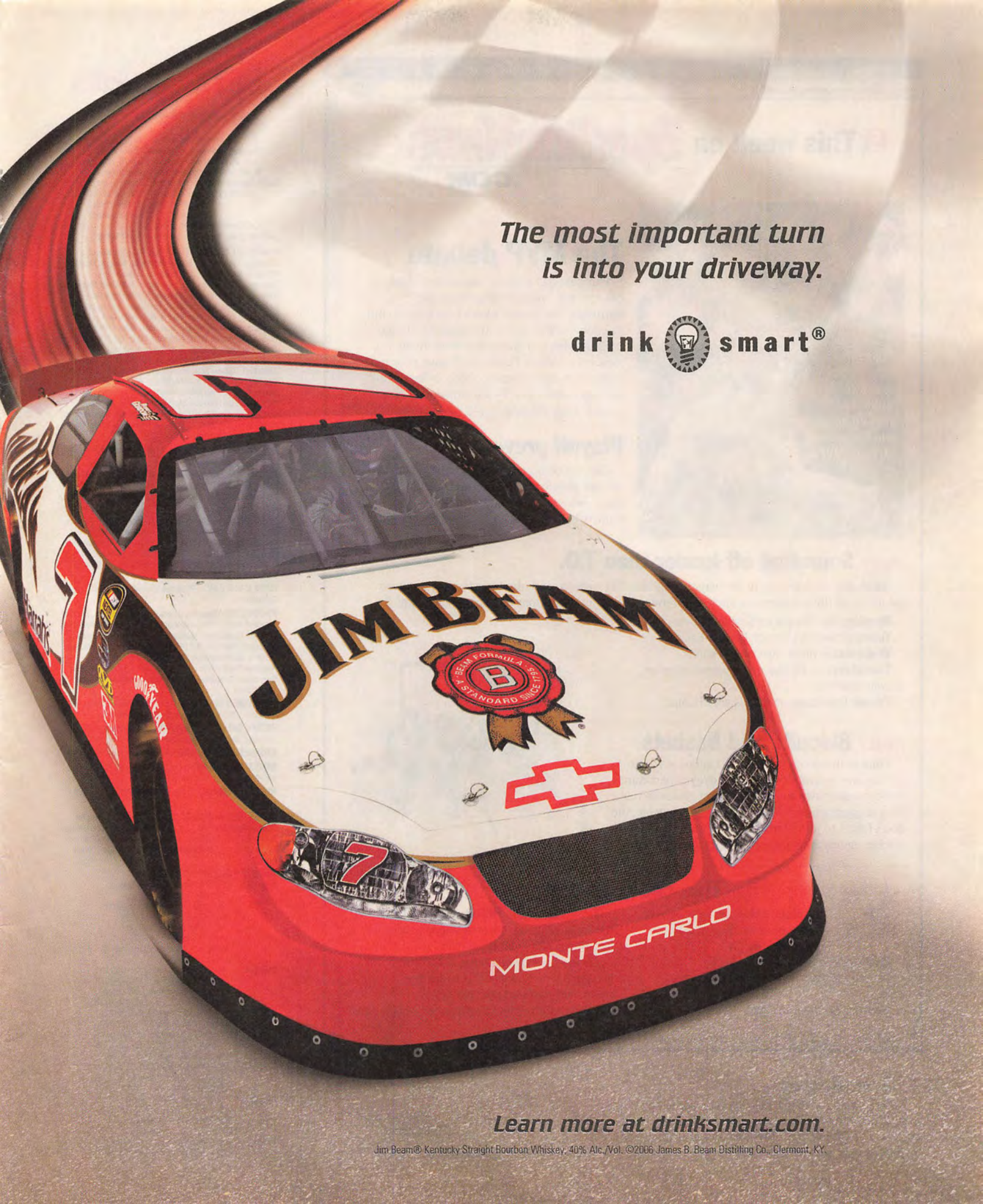
Send your editorial comments or complaints to Senior VP/Editorial Director John Rawlings at jrawlings@sportingnews.com.

Online at SportingNews.COM

To subscribe to the Sporting News call 800-777-6785.

Listen to Sporting News Radio online at radio.sportingnews.com.

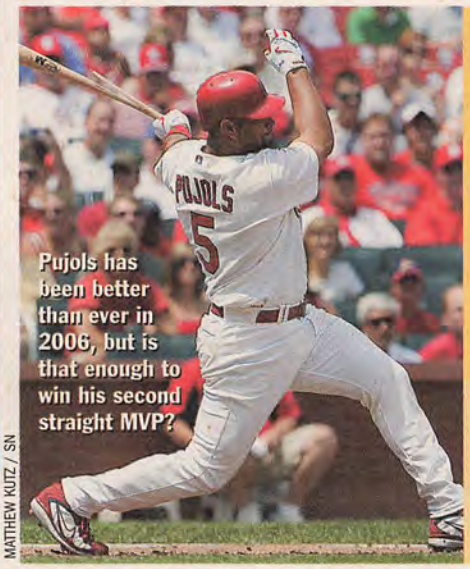
For address changes or subscription questions or problems, e-mail subscription@sportingnews.com. For delivery questions or problems, e-mail delivery@sportingnews.com.


The most important turn
is into your driveway.
drink smart®
JIM BEAM
BEAM FORMULA 1795
A STANDARD SINCE
7
MONTE CARLO
Learn more at drinksmart.com.
Jim Beam® Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey. 40% Alc./Vol. ©2006 James B. Beam Distilling Co., Clermont, KY.

SportingNews.com - Your expert source for MLB Baseball, NFL Football, NBA Basketball, NHL Hocke -

Address http://www.sportingnews.com/ Go

This week on SportingNews.COM



Pujols has been better than ever in 2006, but is that enough to win his second straight MVP?

MATTHEW KUTZ / SN

/BASEBALL/

The MVP debate

Our baseball experts have stated their case for who should bring home the hardware, and now it's your turn to jump into the debate. Whether you contend it should be Derek Jeter or Justin Morneau, Ryan Howard or Albert Pujols, we'll have your man covered in our exclusive photo gallery of all the top contenders. Pick a side and click a photo at sportingnews.com/baseball/mvp.

Playoff preview

Get our complete previews and picks for all four division series Monday—and field your own roster by signing up for playoff fantasy baseball at sportingnews.com/baseball.

/NFL/ Sounding off louder than T.O.

We're almost a quarter of the way through the NFL season, and our experts have opinions galore on all the big names, games and trends. Check out their blogs at sportingnews.com/nfl.

Monday: Dan Pompei on Seahawks-Bears
Tuesday: Dennis Dillon on Packers-Eagles
Wednesday: Vinnie Iyer's weekly primer
Thursday: Dan Pompei on Chargers linebacker Shawne Merriman
Friday: Paul Attner with the latest NFL buzz

/NHL/ Biscuits and baskets

Time to break out the hockey cliches, eh? The NHL season opens October 4. Hockey expert Kara Yorio breaks down the season's first games in her blog at sportingnews.com/experts/kara-yorio/blog. And don't forget to jump into one of SN.com's fantasy hockey games at fantasygames.sportingnews.com.

BOB LEVERONE / SN

/MEMBERS/ This could be you

Member name: Lester's Legends
Member since: August 2002
Home state: MN
Real-world occupation: Marketing
Favorite teams: Red Sox, Pats, T-wolves, Syracuse
Awards: Too many to count

Thoughts on the NFL's top RBs: L.T., L.J. and Tiki are all amazing, but until someone takes his belt, Shaun Alexander is the man.

Do you have what it takes to become a five-star SN.com member? Join our free community and start your journey at members.sportingnews.com/member/sample.html.

Discussions | Discussions not available on http://www.sportingnews.com/

Tuning in

Need to monitor the latest action on game day? *Around the NFL* with Bob Berger and Bob Stelton will keep you updated from 1 to 8 p.m. every Sunday and includes interviews with the day's key performers.

Listen to SportingNews RADIO online at radio.sportingnews.com.

SportingNews

THE FIRST NEWSWEEKLY IN SPORTS

President & CEO C. Richard Allen
Executive VP, President, Radio Clancy Woods
Sr. VP, Editorial Director John D. Rawlings
Sr. VP, Business Development Mike Dubester
Sr. VP, General Manager, Magazine James M. Borth
VP, Chief Legal Counsel Christopher S. Canning
VP & CFO John Kastberg
VP, Operations Kathy Kinkeade
VP, General Manager, Online Jason Kint
VP, Integrated Marketing & Sales Stuart Marvin

EDITORIAL Executive Editor: Bob Hille **Director of Graphics:** Fred Barnes **Senior Managing Editors:** Dale Bye, Bill Marx, Mike Nahrstedt **Managing Editors:** Steve Greenberg, Stan McNeal, Benson Taylor **Assistant Managing Editors:** Jim Gilstrap, Dan Graf, Carl Moritz, Barry Reeves **Senior Editors:** David Bukovich, Tom Gatto, Joe Hoppel, Chris Bergeron Linton, Brendan Roberts, Ron Smith, George Winkler **Projects Editor:** Vinnie Iyer **Web Host:** Kathy Sheldon **Associate Editors:** Corrie Anderson, Chris Bahr, Matt Crossman, Jessica Daues, Tom Dienhart, Tricia Garner, Rob Hurtt, Katie Koss, Roger Kuznia, Ray Slover, Kyle Veltrop **Assistant Editors:** Zach Bodendieck, Ryan Fagan, Erin Farrell, Eric Ferguson, Chris Littmann, Shawn Reid, Jim Ryan **Senior Writers:** Paul Attner, Mike DeCourcy, Dennis Dillon, Matt Hayes, Dan Pompei **Staff Writers:** Sean Deveney, Lee Spencer, Kara Yorio **Contributing Writers:** Dave Kindred, Stuart Miller **Manager of Editorial Promotion:** Lesley Hunt **Editorial Coordinator:** Teri Null

ART Creative Director: Bill Wilson **Art Directors:** Chris Callan, Jack Kruyne, Angie Pillman

PHOTO Chief Photographer: Albert Dickson **Senior Photo Editor:** Paul Nisely **Assistant Photo Editor:** Michael McNamara **Staff Photographers:** Jay Drowns, Bob Leverone, Robert Seale

ONLINE General Manager, Fantasy Sports: Jeff Gerttula **Marketing Director:** Andy Bhatt **Executive Producer:** Beth Jatcko **Promotions Manager:** Matt Judkins **Programming Manager:** Maya Lerch **Programmers:** Tony Cooper, Frank Gallion, Ben Paulsen, Mark Rosenthal-Ayres **Art Director:** James Thompson

RESEARCH CENTER Senior Managing Editor: Steve Gietschier

PRODUCTION Prepress Director: Bob Parajon **Production Director:** Marilyn Kasal **Information Systems Director:** Keith Camden **Distribution Manager:** Steve Guthrie **Prepress Manager:** Russ Carr **Art Director, Special Projects:** Michael Behrens **Ad Production Coordinator:** Dee Dee Douglas **Prepress Specialists:** Cindy Jones, Steve Romer **Prepress Operations Coordinator:** Vern Kasal **Graphic Designer:** Chad Painter

CONSUMER MARKETING Circulation Director: Larry Goldstein **Circulation Manager:** Devon Minervini

RETAIL SALES AND MARKETING Director: Michael Garavalia **Manager, Single Copy Sales:** Bill Hohs

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT VP, Director: Adam London

MEDIA RELATIONS Ketchum Public Relations, 646-935-4046

HUMAN RESOURCES Payroll and Benefits Manager: Lisa Vahle

SALES DEVELOPMENT/MARKETING Sr. Director, Marketing & Strategic Sales: Jason Goodrich **Marketing Director:** Seth Leibowitz **Associate Marketing Director:** Deana Ambrosio **Yearbook Marketing Manager:** James Cress

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES

New York **Eastern Manager:** Chris Greiner 646-424-2221
Account Managers: Peter Aquilino 646-424-2255
David Clutter, 646-424-2256
Peter Weinstock, 646-424-2204
Yearbook Manager: Cory Erstling 646-424-2244

Chicago **Midwest Manager:** Brent Hardesty 312-893-4070, Fax: 312-893-4078
Yearbook Manager: Curtis Costin 847-658-6451, Fax: 847-658-6137

Detroit **VP, Midwest Region:** Jim Plagens 248-637-3008, Fax: 248-637-3029

Los Angeles **VP, Western Region:** Jim Souders 310-399-8750, Fax: 310-399-8769
Western Manager: Matt Estrada 310-399-8756, Fax: 310-399-8769
Yearbook Sales: Virtus Media Sales 310-453-4499, Fax: 310-617-2605

Atlanta **Account Manager:** Charles Alexander 828-526-3233, Fax: 828-526-3112
Yearbook Sales: Lindy Davis 205-871-1182, Fax: 205-871-1184

Dallas **Account Manager:** Dan Kellner 972-529-9687, Fax: 972-529-9688

Dickies RACE FOR THE RICHES!

WIN $500,000

Enter Dickies Race For The Riches At
www.dickies500.com

Dickies 500 TEXAS MOTOR SPEEDWAY NOVEMBER 5, 2006

Dickies®

DICKIES.COM

A LEGEND IN WORK®

©2006 Williamson-Dickie Mfg. Co.

TO KNOW LIST

8 things to make you an INSTANT EXPERT this week

THE MAIN EVENT

1 A hard fall from last autumn

For the first time since the Reds and A's missed the playoffs in 1991, the playoff picture does not include the reigning champion of either the A.L. or the N.L. Are these versions of the White Sox and Astros past the point of no return?

Houston watched club legend Jeff Bagwell hobble to a finish in 2005 and in 2007 will withstand bookend "B" Craig Biggio's wheezing his way toward 3,000 hits and clogging an offense that's in desperate need of Drano. Pitching had been a strength until Brad Lidge met Albert Pujols and Scott Podsednik last October and went to pieces. This season, Roger Clemens made playing hooky 'til June seem reasonable, and then Houston snuck its one true superstar, Roy Oswalt, into trade talks.

The best prognosis for the disheveled Astros is that in a flaccid N.L. Central, one key acquisition (Miguel Tejada for Oswalt, anyone?) or a breakout rookie could build a brighter 2007.

The White Sox, on the other hand, were preordained for 100 wins but wilted in the second half. Their swagger fell to slumber as manager Ozzie Guillen's lips went flippity-flap.

Default leadership came in the person of A.J. Pierzynski, who was busy making every player in the league hate him while curiously quiet captain Paul Konerko allowed this cruise ship full of chaise loungers to drift into an iceberg. The vaunted starting staff, which cut through last year's ALCS like a spoon through paella, tacked a run onto its ERA in 2006. For a team that claims to have starters to spare, only wonderboy Jon Garland is safe for '07.

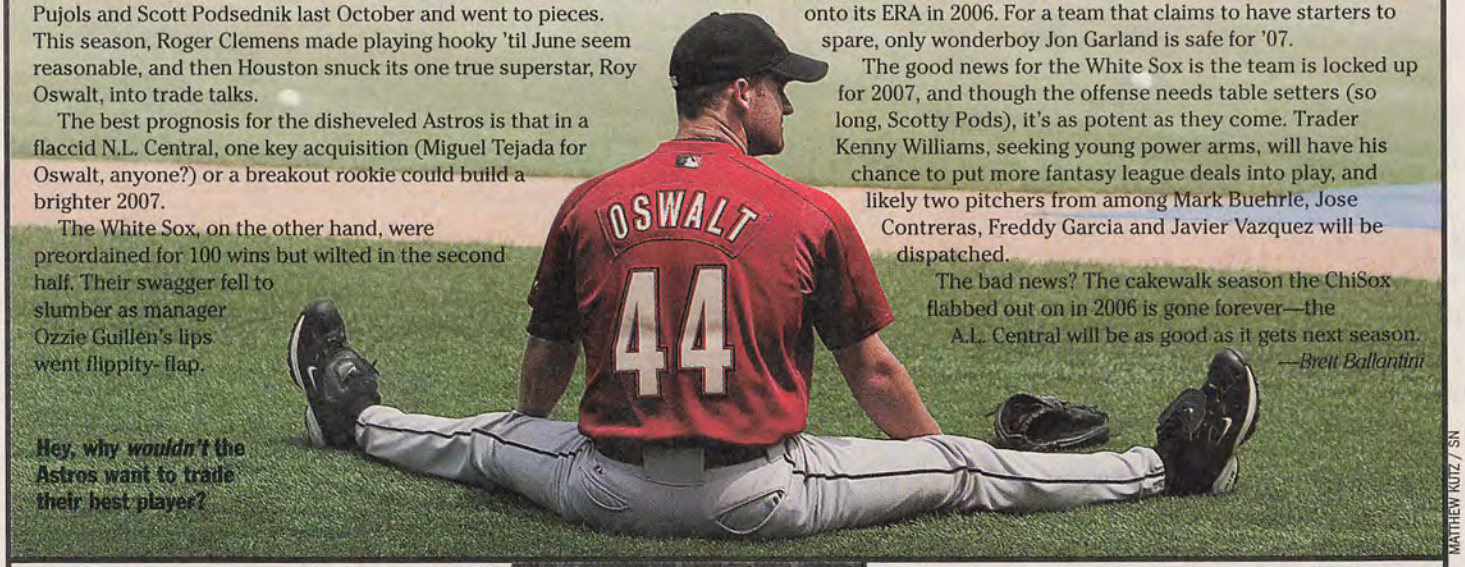
The good news for the White Sox is the team is locked up for 2007, and though the offense needs table setters (so long, Scotty Pods), it's as potent as they come. Trader Kenny Williams, seeking young power arms, will have his chance to put more fantasy league deals into play, and likely two pitchers from among Mark Buehrle, Jose Contreras, Freddy Garcia and Javier Vazquez will be dispatched.

The bad news? The cakewalk season the ChiSox flabbed out on in 2006 is gone forever—the A.L. Central will be as good as it gets next season.

—Brett Ballantini

JAY DROWNS / SN

Konerko and his mates may have been too accepting of defeat.



MATTHEW KULZ / SN

Hey, why *wouldn't* the Astros want to trade their best player?

VIDEO GAMES

2 A hockey faceoff

Hockey video games should be three things: fast-paced, high-scoring and not too cerebral. Of the latest hockey releases—**NHL 07** from EA Sports and **NHL 2K7** from 2K Sports—the latter delivers all three of the essentials. Its controls are intuitive, including a Madden-like hit stick that makes it highly satisfying to control your favorite goon.

Get your puck on the 2K way.

The Xbox 360 version of NHL 07 moves deking and shooting controls to the right analog stick. It's effective but tough to get used to. The controls can be easily reconfigured, but the more adjustments you make, the more likely you'll forget where your shot button is and end up botching your breakaways.

Both games are best experienced on the Xbox 360 because some new features aren't available in PlayStation2 and Xbox versions. But why would you buy both games? The pick is NHL 2K7. *—Seth Elkin*

QUICK CLICKS

3 Who says it's the No Fun League?

The NFL is the hot sport among kids these days—have you been to a mall?—which is why the league created a site just for the little tykes: nflrush.com. Not only are there interviews with the league's hottest players, but there are contests (such as flag football) to enter, a Teacher of the Year award to campaign for ... oh, who are we kidding? Kids want games, and the site has plenty of them—and with fun names such as Gridiron Crush, Backyard Football and Lawn Mower Moe. Put it this way: At least it'll give Junior something to do (for free) while you watch the game.

—Brendan Roberts

NEWS YOU CAN'T USE *NFL fines Burger King guy $50K for 'blatant violation' of uniform code >> Poll: 4 in 5 Chicagoans believe Bears would be greatest team in history of world*

4

TELEVISION

No wilting under these *Lights*

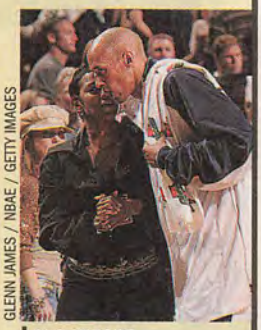
MICHAEL MULLER / AP

You've read the book. You've seen the movie. And now you can watch *Friday Night Lights* on TV (series premieres Tuesday, 8 p.m. ET, NBC). Be patient: The first episode starts slowly as it reveals the culture of a small Texas town that lives and breathes high school football, but the action picks up rather nicely on game night. The show deftly mines the typical elements of small-town football—pressure, undertones of racism, idolatry—and, despite its sometimes gritty feel, scores high with the goose bump factor. The game scenes look real, and you can't help but root for the first-year coach (played by Kyle Chandler) thrust into a spotlight even brighter than he imagined. *—Tricia Garner*

5

King of the castle? Hardly

You've heard the stories about NBA guard Doug Christie and his outspoken wife, Jackie. Their unique (some would say Oedipal) relationship is on full display in BET J Network's new reality show *Committed: The Christies* (premieres Wednesday, 10 p.m. ET). Don't expect to see much basketball action—the first episode centers on the Christies' trip to Jamaica. That includes heartwarming scenes such as Jackie calling an American Airlines employee a "bitch" and a "whore" behind her back and later following Doug in a golf cart as he goes on a run. If that's your idea of fun, have at it—but if an *entertaining* cheesy reality show featuring a pro athlete is what you're after, you'd be better off sticking with Emmitt Smith on *Dancing with the Stars*. *—T.G.*


GLENN JAMES / NBAE / GETTY IMAGES

Love means never daring to acknowledge the existence of another woman.

6

DETROIT ROCKS

Mad fun in the Motor City

The Red Wings and Pistons led the NHL and NBA in wins in 2005-06—the first time teams in the same city have done that in the same season. After sweeping the Royals, the re-resurgent Tigers entered the week with the best record in baseball. Throw in the Shock's WNBA championship and the Wolverines' strong start and Motown is enjoying unprecedented Best Sports City-level success. If only Detroit had a professional football team … *—Matt Crossman*

CHARLIE RIEDEL / AP

Think the Tigers are having fun? They've got nothing on their fans.

7

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S BIG WEEK

It's dangerous at the top

OK, so it's not the Showdown Saturday of two weeks past. How about Scare the Hell Out of You Saturday?

In the ever-present world of You Never Know, college football's top two teams could get their first losses this weekend. Ohio State is at Iowa (8 p.m. ET on ABC), and both of Ohio State's losses last season were on the road in prime time.

CAROLYN KASTER / AP

Penn State left the Buckeyes for dead one night in '05.

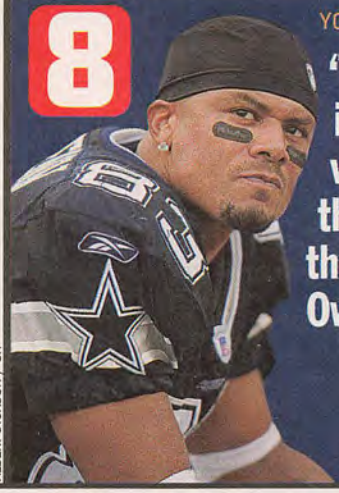
Meanwhile, No. 2 Southern California travels to Washington State (7 p.m., TBS), and here's a little-known fact: Since 2001, Wazzu is one of two Pac-10 teams (California is the other) that have beaten the Trojans. And the Cougars' last win over USC was in The Palouse.

If that's not enough, the SEC could be thrown into chaos by a couple of desperate teams: South Carolina and Alabama. The Gamecocks already have one league loss and get conference heavy Auburn in Columbia on Thursday (7:30 p.m., ESPN). Maybe SpurDog has some of that old magic hidden somewhere?

Then there's Bama, which last season welcomed Urban Meyer to the SEC with a 28-point loss on his noggin. Don't think the Tide can't beat Florida again—especially considering how Kentucky's thrill-a-minute offense (sarcasm, folks) went up and down the field against the Gators last weekend. *—Matt Hayes*

8

YOU HEARD IT HERE


ALBERT DICKSON / SN

'Terry Glenn is more valuable to the Cowboys than Terrell Owens.'

—NFL Scouts Views, *page 34*

if they had Ditka >> Source: Big Papi ready to become a Yankee >> Weis: Irish defense 'better than any we had in New England' >> U.S. to field amateurs in '08 Ryder Cup

ON DECK

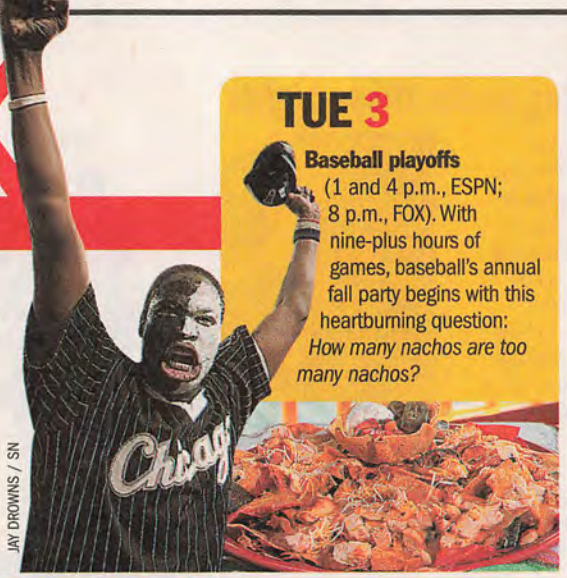
The week ahead in sports

THIS I GOTTA SEE

All times Eastern

SAT 30

Alabama at Florida (3:30 p.m., CBS). Another Saturday, another red-letter (or crimson, if you prefer) game for the Gators, who already have beaten Tennessee and still have games against LSU, Auburn, Georgia, Florida State—and the Jacksonville Jags.



JAY DROWNS / SN

TUE 3

Baseball playoffs (1 and 4 p.m., ESPN; 8 p.m., FOX). With nine-plus hours of games, baseball's annual fall party begins with this heartburning question: *How many nachos are too many nachos?*

SUN 1

The Chase continues with the **Banquet 400** (2 p.m., NBC), where the drivers may have a hard time seeing the track because of leftover smoke residue from the Weber grills at Kansas Speedway and at Arrowhead for the Chiefs' game.

■ The best sports month starts in style with two primo NFL games. On the AFC side, you've got **Patriots-Bengals** (4:15 p.m., CBS) and the Brady-Palmer sidebar that comes with it. In the NFC, you've got **Seahawks-Bears** (8:15 p.m., NBC), who again are hellbent on being their conference's two top dogs.

MON 2

Packers at Eagles (8:30 p.m., ESPN). Remember when that noted football analyst T.O. suggested Philly would be better off with Brett Favre than Donovan McNabb? Watch and then *you* pick.

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

DAVE EINSEL / AP

Here's your chance to see Favre *and* McNabb rifling passes to Eagles players.

WED 4

Are you ready for some ... *hockey*? They are at Versus, the channel formerly known as OLN, where the puck drops twice, starting with the **Sabres at the top-of-the-world Hurricanes** (7 p.m.), followed by a couple of old friends, the **Stars and Avs** (10 p.m.).

FRI 6

Get primed for Red River Shootout weekend with a **Texas-Oklahoma** (2 p.m., ESPN Classic) marathon that looks at the games from 1984, '94 and '96. Those games were evenly split—yep, one win, one loss, one tie apiece—but the Sooners have asked for their 'L' to be stricken from the record.

—Kyle Veltrop

COMING AT YOU

In the October 13 issue

Man on a mission. Go ahead; name the NFL's best defensive player in the past, oh, 25 years. Lawrence Taylor? Reggie White? Ray Lewis? Whoever is on your shortlist, tell 'em to make room for one more: Shawne Merriman. The 22-year-old Chargers linebacker outhits, outworks and out*feels* most everybody—and the anger inside him makes him not only the league's most promising player but also a truly fascinating character study. Dan Pompei will take you inside Merriman's game, and his life, in a story you won't want to miss.

■ Two weeks that will make or break Florida quarterback Chris Leak's career.

■ MLB Insider Mike Berardino's season award winners.

ROBERT SEALE / SN

Merriman's drive is reminiscent of another famous 56's.

STARTING 5

1 Bronx zoo. Everybody hates A-Rod. The controversy has even worn down Joe Torre, whose frustration was obvious when he blinked three times in one game.

2 The NFL. T.O. broke his finger, and 9 of 10 doctors recommended wiring his jaw shut.

3 Hissing sound. Hear about all the hubbub around Richard Childress Racing's tire-pressure practices? I'm concerned that if it's suddenly verboten to release hot air, Lee Corso is going to be out of a job.

4 Say what? If the Seahawks *really* wanted to distract their opponents, they wouldn't pump in fan noise—they'd pump in the voices in **Chad Johnson**'s head.

MATTHEW KUTZ / SN

5 College football. You've got to love conference games—exciting rivalries, crude shout-outs, frequent manhood-questioning. Wait, no, I'm looking at my Ryder Cup notes.

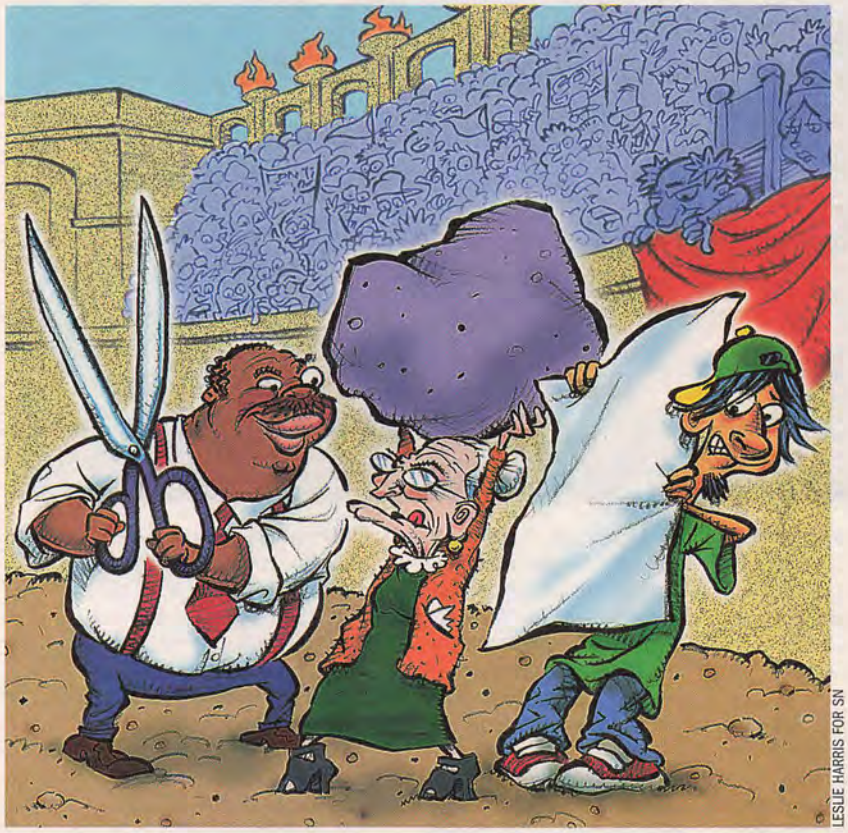
—Matt Crossman

MY TURN

Tricia Garner
Young and Restless
tgarner@sportingnews.com

Shooting stars

Their hearts, bodies and minds are strong. Unfortunately, their paper is pathetic.



LESLIE HARRIS FOR SN

The place is buzzing. One guy is bouncing around the room in a white track suit and blue sweatband, a bundle of nervous energy. Two kids are huddled in the corner, going over strategy. A man with a bushy gray beard peels off his flannel shirt and starts stretching.

Welcome to tonight's RPS Tournament, the March Madness of the sport that "forces people to test their minds, their bodies and their hearts." The sport otherwise known as … Rock, Paper, Scissors.

And you thought it was just a way to determine the path to take at the most important crossroads of your life. No, RPS is a sport—the most popular sport in history, contends the World RPS Society. Each year, there are scores of tournaments across the country that test contestants' skills, wits and ability to brandish a menacing "paper."

Tournaments such as the one I'm about to participate in.

Look, I've done my homework. There is a treasure trove of RPS strategy available on the Internet, and I've tapped into it. Rule No. 1: Know your opponent. I've learned that people who throw down the rock are the most aggressive. The rock also is the bailout move of choice when a player starts to fall behind. Scissors people are confident and crafty—they're aggressive, too, but in a *controlled* way. Players are most likely to flash scissors when they're winning. Paper people? They're what normal people call passive-aggressive; RPS experts call them subtle.

Seriously. This is all online.

After careful study, I decide I'm going to be a rock person. There ain't nothing subtle about dominating the RPS world. I'm here to *win*, baby!

The rules: best-of-three rounds, single-elimination. Each bout is refereed by a Gold's Gym trainer, who allegedly also is available to offer his expertise before the commencement of each smackdown. My trainer is a lanky guy named Tom.

"So, you got any good tips for me?" I ask.

He looks at me. "Um," he says, "no."

Well, all right then.

My first opponent is a woman in her 30s. "Ready?" Tom asks us. Oh, honey, I was *born* ready. "OK, go!"

Rock, paper, scissors, shoot! I throw down a rock; her scissors can't take it. I'm up, 1-0. I stick with rock on the second throw; she switches it up and tosses out a paper. We're tied up. It all comes down to this, the final throw. I'm sticking with the rock, she comes out with … scissors! *I win!* Trainer Tom hands me my golden ticket to the second round, and I skip to the table to collect my complimentary victory smoothie.

At the RPS Tournament, you can cut the tension with a thousand pairs of finger scissors.

In no time, we're on to the second round. You can cut the tension with a thousand pairs of finger scissors. It's *on*.

My next opponent is a blond teen. I kid you not, his hands are shaking. And why wouldn't they be? His friends are watching, his athletic prowess is on the line, his very reputation for the remainder of his high school life is at stake.

We start quickly. I barely get out my rock in time to match his paper.

"Let's go again," the referee says.

I throw a rock; he throws scissors. Then I start getting cute and dish out a paper to his paper. A rock to his rock. We give each other a little smile, a smile that says, "I respect you as a competitor." And then I do the unthinkable. Inexplicably, I abandon my rock strategy again and opt for paper. He flashes the scissors, and …

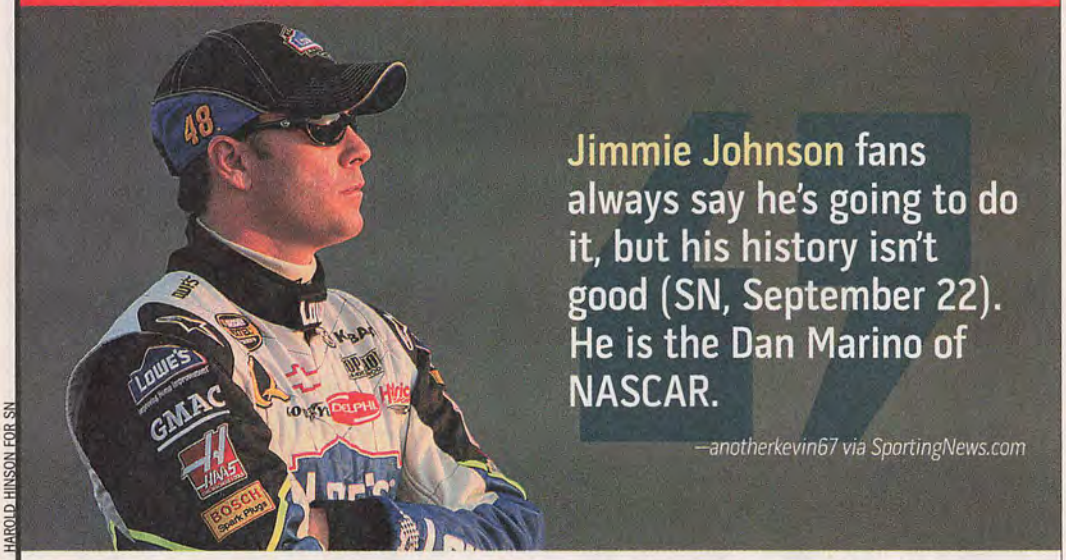
"Good job," he says.

What?! I *lost*? How could this have happened? I'll tell you how it happened: I got cocky. I'm a rock person, not a paper person. Why was I trying to be a paper person? I'm not subtle! I'm anything *but* subtle! I'm aggressive, not passive-aggressive!

Whatever. I wasn't even trying anyway.

YOUR TURN

You rant, we listen. Send e-mails to yourturn@sportingnews.com.



HAROLD HINSON FOR SN

Jimmie Johnson fans always say he's going to do it, but his history isn't good (SN, September 22). He is the Dan Marino of NASCAR.

—anotherkevin67 via SportingNews.com

■ I want to thank you for jumping on the Notre Dame bandwagon in your college football preview (SN, August 25). The SPORTING NEWS jinx lives on! *—Joe D'Augustine, Canton, Ohio*

■ If I were the SPORTING NEWS, I'd tell myself that my preseason national title pick still had a chance to run the table and win it all. But I'd know deep down I was lying. *—wolvysden via SportingNews.com*

■ The apathy in America toward steroids use is linked to its addiction to sports entertainment at all levels (SN, September 22). I have a friend who interviewed for a teaching/coaching position at a high school—he was interviewed by two people for the teaching slot and 10 for the coaching position. I doubt it's an isolated incident. *—Kevin Morley via e-mail*

■ Once again, the NCAA puts dollars over athletics (SN, September 22). The way to speed up college football is not to make sure there are fewer plays but to have fewer commercials and stoppages in play. *—Kevin Corbet, Macungie, Pa.*

■ Paul Attner tells us Drew Bledsoe is washed up and the Cowboys' offensive line is pitiful (SN, September 22). After one game? I'm looking forward to the article that will have the 'Boys playing in Miami in February. *—Shane Wentz via e-mail*

■ The SPORTING NEWS was remiss to give no credible mention to the WNBA Finals. As a subscriber, I would appreciate the magazine doing a better job covering the WNBA. It is far more entertaining than the joke the NBA has become. *—Jay Roberts, Wareham, Mass.*

POLLING PLACE

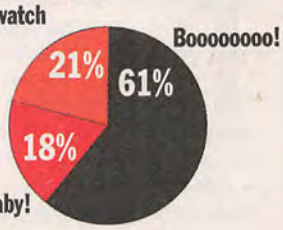
How would you feel about a Mets-Yankees Subway Series?

SPORTINGNEWS.COM USERS

If my team is out of it, sure—it would be cool to watch

SPORTING NEWS STAFF

If my team is out of it, sure—it would be cool to watch



RADIO★STAR

Real talk from a fan on Sporting News Radio

'Money has a lot to do with why A-Rod is under the microscope. No player could ever live up to the expectations that come along with a $25 million-a-year contract. People expect him to hit a home run every time up because of his price tag.' *—Gary in Colorado on the David Stein Show*

GMC BLOG LIKE THE PROS

Posted by PeteDYanks24:

This year's A.L. East title is the ninth straight for the Yankees. That is the second-longest streak in sports behind the Braves' string of 14 straight N.L. East titles, which ended this year. Four Yankees have been a part of this entire streak: Derek Jeter, Mariano Rivera, Jorge Posada and Bernie Williams. It seems like days ago these players were coming up.

This title is special because it was against the odds. They lost two of their best hitters, Hideki Matsui and Gary Sheffield. Robinson Cano missed more than a month in the summer. So the Yankees relied on the young players to pick up the slack. Melky Cabrera took over for Matsui in left and succeeded with solid hitting and great fielding. After a weak start, the rotation turned it around. The Yankees overcame obstacles and celebrated with champagne in Toronto.

But don't let it get in your eyes, fellas, because we're not done yet.

FRANK GUNN / AP

Hey, Mariano—save some of that bubbly for the playoffs, would ya?

To see more of PeteDYanks24's blog, and many others, visit **SPORTINGBLOGS** *at* sportingnews.com.

VIDEO GAMES

Cutting the cord

In case you hadn't noticed, the whole world has gone wireless. Phones, PDAs, WiFi Internet. And video games are next.

Wireless controllers are available for the current generation of game consoles, though there's nothing special about them aside from the freedom they give you to sit where you want. But in the next generation of systems—especially Nintendo's forthcoming Wii—wireless will change the way you play. The controllers for the Wii (due in stores November 19; $250) and Sony's PlayStation 3 (November 17; $499 and up) are wireless *and* motion-sensitive. No more sitting around. You'll have to physically move the controller to make things happen on the screen.

Nintendo plans a game collection called Wii Sports, including baseball and tennis games that will fully showcase the control system's capabilities. Without the likenesses of real-life athletes, Wii Sports isn't aimed at hard-core sports fans. It'll be great for parties, though, because it'll get people up and moving around the room. Think of it as sports video game karaoke.

More interesting to sports fans will be the newest version of Madden '07 from EA Sports, which will play to the Wii's uniqueness. Players will flick the controller backward to snap the ball and wave it forward to throw passes.

Microsoft's Xbox 360 has optional wireless controllers, though they aren't motion-sensitive. Microsoft recently announced several wireless accessories for the 360, including the Wireless Racing Wheel ($149.99), which rumbles to simulate bumpy roads and improves the realism of driving games. The wheel is for use with Project Gotham Racing 3 and Test Drive: Unlimited.

Sony and the game manufacturers have been relatively quiet about the extent of the PS3's motion-sensing features. But it's clear the next generation of video gaming will offer more than just fancier graphics. So start brushing up on your hand-eye coordination or risk getting massacred. —*Seth Elkin*

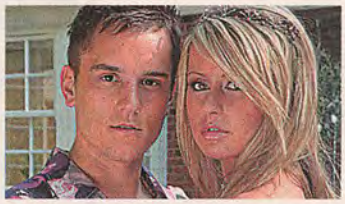
Carry the Wireless Racing Wheel down life's bumpy roads.

DOUGLAS EVANS

TELEVISION

Desperately seeking an American audience

Behind every great football player is a great woman—or a materialistic, melodramatic and conniving one.



We know that's a *Footballers* wife—but *who is that guy*!?

That's what the creators of *Footballers' Wive$* might have you believe. The hit British show about soccer players' significant others is being adapted by ABC for an American audience, and the new version will take place in the world of American football.

The show is in the project phase—a pilot script is being written—so there is no timetable for when it will hit U.S. airwaves. But if it does, viewers can expect over-the-top story lines similar to those in *Desperate Housewives*. Plots in the British version have revolved around extramarital affairs, drug use, kidnapping, rape, murder and everyone's favorite—hermaphrodite babies.

One thing American viewers should not expect is much football. The British show's producers have said it is "as much about football as *Dallas* is about oil," and the American producers do not intend to change that, a spokesperson for the show says.

The American version is being produced by Touchstone Television, the same studio that produced ESPN's *Playmakers*. ESPN chose not to renew *Playmakers* after one season, in part because of negative reaction from the NFL brass to the show's unflattering portrayal of professional football.

The NFL is aware of the American adaptation of *Footballers' Wive$*. A spokesperson says the league would be involved only if the show asked to use NFL logos or anything else requiring league approval. —*Jim Ryan*

Upon further review ...

A photo of Ken Schrader was identified as Ricky Rudd in the September 29 issue.

THE OFFICIAL VEHICLE OF THE

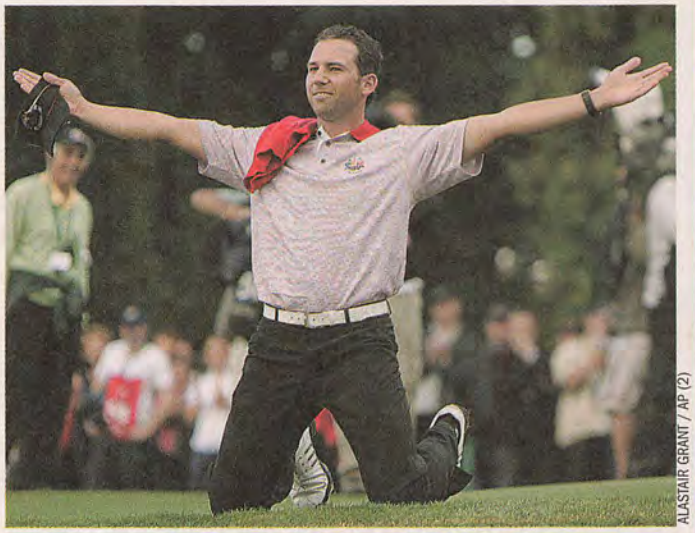
NFL

©2006 General Motors Corp. All rights reserved. Sierra, Denali, GMC and GMC logo are registered trademarks of the General Motors Corporation. ©2006 NFL Properties LLC. All NFL-related trademarks are trademarks of the National Football League.

BUSHMILLS
IRISH WHISKEY
presents Ryder Cup rewind

American graffiti

The writing is on the wall, folks, and it's too late to shield our eyes: When it comes to golf, we can't hold Europe's putter *By Matt Crossman*



ALASTAIR GRANT / AP (2)

Monty (below) won won again. Sergio Garcia exulted, and who could blame him? As for Mickelson, well ... not good.

The Europeans were so dominant in their win over the United States in the Ryder Cup matches last week that the U.S. couldn't even come out on top in an American institution: trash-talking. A publication in Dublin took honors in that category for its reporting about our players' better halves. (Although it's hard to feel beaten considering they made fun of our guys' wives for being hot.)

Somehow, we let that stand. You would think, considering the U.S. saved Europe's bacon in World War II and then paid to rebuild the place afterward, that we would have come out stronger in the braggadocio department.

Ah, well, we couldn't talk smack, we couldn't hit big shots, we couldn't do anything right. Or maybe the Euros just couldn't do anything wrong. The simple fact is, *gulp*, those guys played—and will continue to play—better. Europe won every round of play, it didn't look like we had a chance in any of them, and there's no reason to believe the situation will improve before the next Ryder Cup two years from now.

The big knock on the American team long has been that we're too individualistic, that we're not team players. That might very well be true, but going on our own didn't help. The U.S. won three of 12 singles matches on Sunday.

Europe certainly was favored to win, but with the tournament played on an American-style course, the U.S. players were expected to at least not throw up in their hats. Everybody's wearing new visors, and it's hard to look at the U.S. roster and single out anybody for blame (except maybe Phil Mickelson, who got bageled for the weekend). Then again, it's hard to look at the U.S. roster and recognize many names. Without looking it up, is Vaughn Taylor a golfer or a Supreme Court justice? For all Americans know about match play and politics, he might be both; in two matches, he picked up half a point.

PETER MORRISON / AP

Only five of the top 20 players in the world are Americans, and the longer the Ryder Cup dragged on and the more the Euros kicked our teeth in, the more five looked like it might be too many. Colin Montgomerie ran his astounding unbeaten streak in singles Ryder Cup matches to eight. Darren Clarke played emotional, inspired golf, just weeks after his wife died of cancer. A captain's choice, Clarke went 3-0, including a pummeling Sunday over some other Supreme Court justice wannabe, Zach Johnson, 3 and 2. With the outcome guaranteed, everybody—caddies, teammates, Tiger—hugged him, and it was impossible not to want to give Clarke a smoke and a pint of ale and hug the man's neck yourdamnself.

But Clarke and Monty weren't the standout stars. That honor goes to Paul Casey, who thumped Jim Furyk in match play Sunday. Casey went undefeated for the weekend, winning two matches and halving two, which meant three points for Europe. He hit the shot of the tournament, an ace on Saturday. It was Casey's first ace as a pro, and it was the first in history that won a Ryder Cup match.

The Euros won 18½ to 9½, the same margin as two years ago. It could have been worse. One match late Sunday was halved after Europe conceded a long birdie putt on 18, apparently because the Cup had been decided and the celebration had started getting out of hand.

How nice of them. We don't need their pity.

Or maybe we do.

IRISH AT ITS BEST
BUSHMILLS
ENJOY BUSHMILLS RESPONSIBLY (AND SMOOTHLY)
©2006 Imported by The Bushmills Co., Norwalk, CT.

IRISH AT ITS BEST

AFTER YOU'VE SPENT SOME TIME IN THE ROUGH, WE SUGGEST YOU SPEND SOME TIME WITH THE SMOOTH.

ENJOY BUSHMILLS RESPONSIBLY (AND SMOOTHLY)

BUSHMILLS Blended Irish Whiskey 40% Alc/Vol ©2006 Imported by The Bushmills Co., Norwalk, CT

Beyond com

Mets shortstop JOSE REYES has tools—Yankees shortstop DEREK JETER has hardware. Fans will get to see the difference up close during a Subway Series.

By Sean Deveney

Jose Reyes was sipping an El Presidente beer in a Mets clubhouse that was fulfilling a seasonlong forecast for cumulonimbus clouds of cigar smoke and occasional showers of champagne. The Mets had just clinched their first division title in 18 years, and Reyes was trying to sum up his feelings, in rapid-fire Spanish, to a reporter. That's when hefty veteran reliever Roberto Hernandez crept behind Reyes and poured a beer over his head. The added hops made Reyes, already sporting a frazzled 'do, look like an exploded souffle. "Ay," Reyes said, grimacing and wiping his eyes. "I'm not used to this."

Patience, Jose. Chances are, you'll get used to that alcohol-in-the-eyes sting, perhaps by Halloween. The Mets are good—World Series-good—thanks in part to Reyes, the ever-smiling 23-year-old switch hitter who, in just his second full season, appears on his way to becoming the most productive shortstop (Bud Harrelson is his stiffest competition) and leadoff hitter (Mookie Wilson) in franchise history. Reyes is a feisty hitter and a feistier baserunner, an All-Star and an MVP candidate. "He's a pain," says Marlins manager Joe Girardi. "He's the most exciting young player in the game. ... There are just so many things he can do to hurt you."

A Big Apple shortstop who is key to his club, who delivers pain to opponents in a variety of ways? Sound familiar? For Reyes, the comparisons to that other local shortstop, the Yankees' Derek Jeter, are inevitable though misguided. Those comparisons will become more

pare

The Yankees' captain knows how to navigate October waters. Will Reyes find the going a bit rough in his maiden voyage?

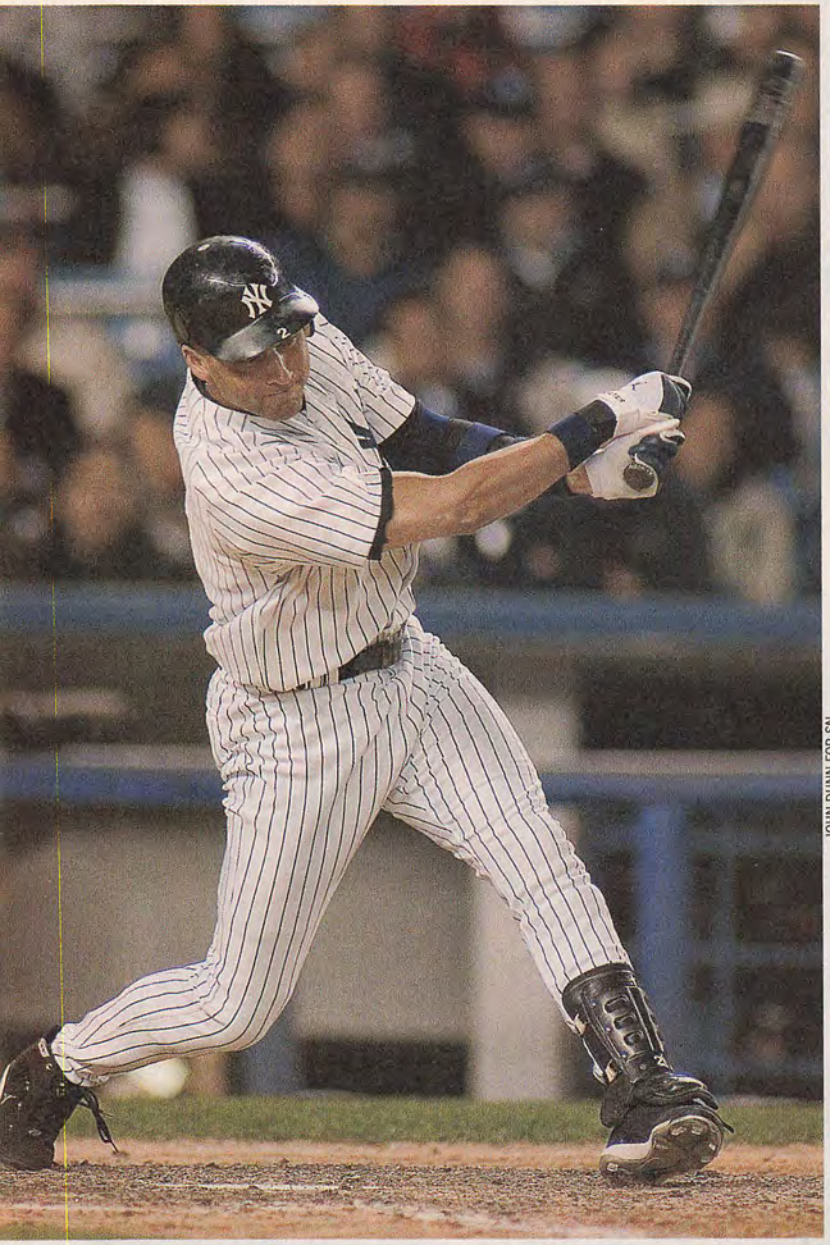
fashionable as we press into a playoff season in which New York is king. The Mets, by far, are the best team in the National League. They have a versatile offense that combines speed (first in steals) and power (second in slugging), veteran pitching and a lights-out bullpen (first in ERA). The Yankees own the American League: first in runs, second in home runs, third in steals and fifth in ERA.

The view from here says baseball, six years removed from the Yankees' last World Series victory—over the Mets, by the way—is rumbling toward another interborough showdown, Queens vs. the Bronx, No. 7 train vs. No. 4 train. (Ready for New York cliches aplenty? *Fuhgeddaboudit!*) On the night the Mets clinched the division, several Shea Stadium fans, perhaps toning their vocal cords in October anticipation, broke into an impromptu chant of *Yank-ees suck!* while the Yankees were 500 miles away in Toronto.

Such a clash will put the spotlight on each team's keystone: its shortstop. Jeter unquestionably is the most important Yankee this postseason. The same can be said about Reyes and the Mets, but we know what to expect from Jeter at this time of year; Reyes is a blank slate. His improved patience at the plate—his 49 walks are up dramatically from last year's 27—must hold up in the playoffs. His power can be an early-game weapon. Most important, he needs to use his speed and aggressiveness to disrupt defenses, distract pitchers and create RBI opportunities for hitters behind him. "When he's on, he makes everybody else in the lineup better," says No. 2 hitter Paul Lo Duca.

That, again, sounds like Jeter, a do-it-all who rescued what could have been a disastrous season for the Yankees. When the offense was battered by injuries to Gary Sheffield and Hideki Matsui, Jeter responded with his best numbers in seven years. That's why the notion of comparing Reyes to him is absurd. Jeter is just different. "Anyone that has watched the

REYES BY VICTOR BALDIZON / GETTY IMAGES; JETER BY NICK LAHAM / GETTY IMAGES



JOHN DUNN FOR SN

Jeter may take longer than Reyes to put the ball in play, but a lot of good things happen when both players swing the bat.

Yankees on an everyday basis knows what Jeter brings," manager Joe Torre told reporters. "There is a consistency and a stability to him that is tremendous."

Reyes and Jeter share a city and a position but, at this point, little else. Jeter has four World Series rings. Reyes has a division title hat. Ask Mets general manager Omar Minaya to compare the two and his face crinkles like origami. An accurate comparison for Reyes, Minaya says, is ace leadoff man Rickey Henderson, who was brought in by the Mets in spring training to work with Reyes. Henderson and Reyes have the same body type, and Henderson, like Reyes, was known for power from the leadoff spot and for being a pain on the bases.

As for Jeter, Minaya says, "That guy in the Bronx has done a lot of winning. Jose is young; he has a lot to learn. He has a chance to be an excellent player, like Jeter. But Derek Jeter plays for championships. Jose needs to get to that point before you can compare them."

Though Minaya prefers the Henderson comparison, others see Alex Rodriguez or Miguel Tejada when they look at Reyes. Jeter transcends comparisons to

REYES VS. JETER

Tale of the tape

Reyes	Jeter
HEIGHT	
6-0	6-3
WEIGHT	
175	195
CAREER AVERAGE	
.285	.316
DEFINING STAT	
40 triples (third on the Mets' all-time list)	.412 OBP in '06.
DEFINING MOMENT	
Inside-the-park home run September 7 against the Dodgers	Running flip to Jorge Posada to retire Jeremy Giambi in the 2001 playoffs
POSTSEASON GAMES	
0	115
HOME IS ...	
Villa Gonzalez, D.R.	Kalamazoo, Mich.
HOMESICK IS ...	
Moving his parents from the Dominican Republic to Queens to live with him	Dialing up $300-per-month phone bills as an 18-year-old in 1992, his first season in the minor leagues
ROMANCE	
Longtime girlfriend, Katherine	Mariah Carey, Miss Universe Lara Dutta

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

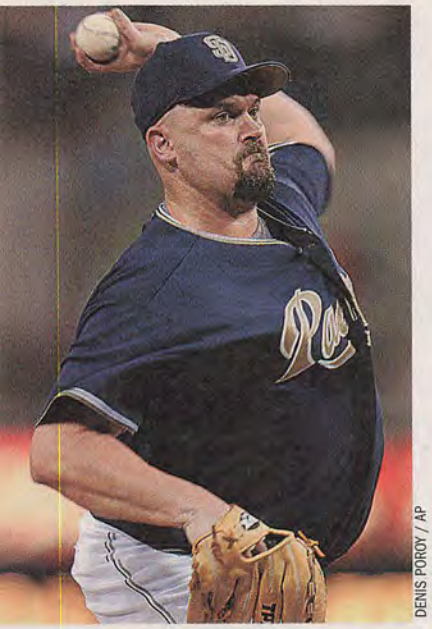
when the goal is healthy hair, start at the line of scrimmage.

the totally reinvented head & shoulders HydraZinc formula contains 6x the moisturizers,* leaving your scalp and hair healthy and 100% flake-free.**

*vs. non-conditioning shampoo. **free of visible flakes with regular use. ©2006 P&G

new!

head & shoulders



DENIS POROY / AP

Wells is a large part of why the Padres will still be playing in the middle of the month.

The outlook for October

■ A 40-something lefty starter will come up big. Take your pick out of the Yankees' Randy Johnson, the Mets' Tom Glavine, the Padres' David Wells or the Tigers' Kenny Rogers.

■ A superstar will be booed at home when he fails to deliver in a clutch situation. Sorry, A-Rod, this is your life—at least until you improve that .167 postseason average with runners in scoring position by a couple of hundred points.

■ The Athletics won't make it past the first round—again—because they'll struggle against hard throwers.

■ The Padres will make it past the first round. They have the best balance of pitching and defense in the National League, and that will help them overcome the lowest-scoring offense among playoff contenders.

■ Cardinals manager Tony La Russa won't be seen smiling. Two reasons: 1. He rarely smiles even when his team gives him reason to; 2. This year, he won't have reason to.

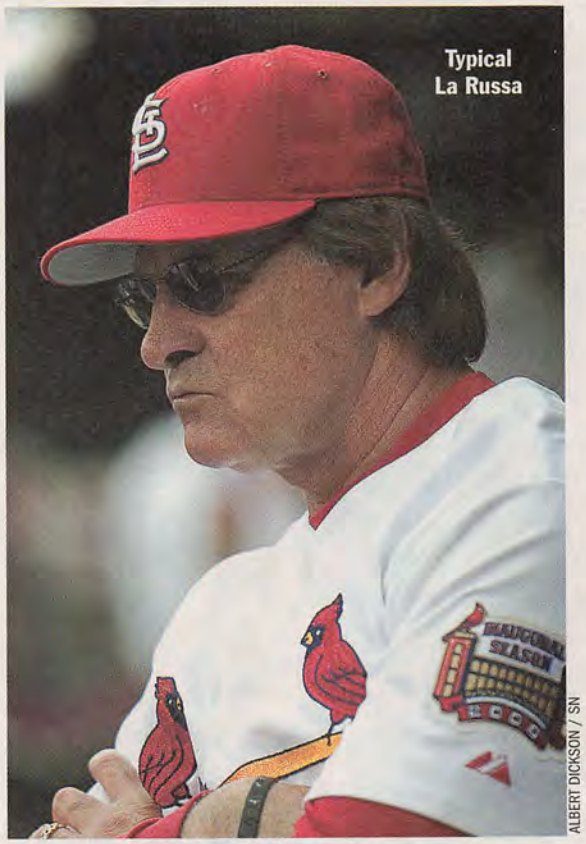
■ Someone from a team that loses to a wild-card club will grumble that division champs should be given a bigger break than the one-game home-field advantage. And he will be right. The first round should be a 2-1-2 format.

■ Someone—a lot of someones—will accuse Tim McCarver of talking too much. They also will be right.

■ FOX won't be happy with the World Series matchup of Yankees-Mets because it doesn't have the coast-to-coast appeal of Yankees-Dodgers.

■ The National League will end its eight-game losing streak at some point in the World Series.

■ The Yankees will win the World Series in five games. Mariano Rivera will record the last out, Jorge Posada will run out and hug him, Joe Torre will shed a tear, and Derek Jeter will pump his fist. You remember all that, don't you? *—Stan McNeal*



Typical La Russa

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Typical (again this year) Torre

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

his baseball peers. He crushes opponents with discipline and focus. His Yankees have reached the playoffs every year he has been in the big leagues. This year, he is the favorite for the A.L. MVP and a contender for the batting title with a .338 average.

Jeter is a 6-3 package of Chinese water torture in pinstripes, a player who can't be sized up by any number other than wins. Torre likens him to Tiger Woods. General manager Brian Cashman once compared Jeter to—get this—Secretariat.

For this Mets team, it's best to avoid nudging Reyes to be Jeter-like. Jeter is professional and handles himself with a rigidity that is expected from a captain, a mentality other Yankees adopt in turn. That's not Reyes. He's a ball of energy and anticipation whose occasional goofs are tempered by his speed and daring. Jeter is steadiness. Reyes is excitement.

That's why Mets first baseman Carlos Delgado chafes at the notion of transforming Reyes into Jeter Jr. Delgado says Reyes and his fellow phenom, third baseman David Wright, are "free spirits" and that the veterans on the team enjoy their enthusiasm. "Playing with guys like that keeps you young," notes 40-year-old pitcher Tom Glavine. "That's a good feeling."

Sometimes, at least. On the day after the Mets clinched the division, Randolph gave his regulars a day off. Reyes' teammates bemoaned the fact that they'd have to sit on the bench with the gabby Reyes for nine innings. "Comparing Jose to anyone is not fair," Delgado says. "Telling him he has to be more like this guy or that guy—why? Jose is himself. That's what we need—him to be himself and learn. Hopefully he knows that by now."

Reyes should know that by now because he's surrounded by teachers. Minaya has made an effort to pack the roster with veterans who will guide promising youngsters such as Reyes, Wright and outfielder Lastings Milledge. It's the kind of support Jeter had when he joined the Yankees full time in 1996—the clubhouse included strong, unassuming leaders Paul O'Neill and Bernie Williams. Reyes has been tutored about professionalism by 48-year-old Julio Franco and 36-year-old Jose Valentin. "Those players have been around; they know how things work," Reyes says. "They have given me so much help. When you are young, you have to listen to guys like them."

Except that Reyes sometimes can be a delicate pupil. He is maturing, but he's still young and impatient. Valentin smiles like the parent of a hardheaded teen when talking about him. "With Jose, you have to say things to him a lot," Valentin says. "He wants to learn, but you have to tell him again and again until he knows how to do it.

"He is going to be a great player. But we have to keep him straight. He has to realize he always has to be the same. There

have got to be some days where things are good and some days where things are bad. But he has to know, he has got to be the same, every day."

Jeter *is* the same every day. He became a star early, winning Rookie of the Year and hitting .360 in the playoffs on his way to a '96 World Series ring. It's as if Jeter entered the majors as a polished veteran. Reyes was a case of Pledge short of being polished when he arrived. He was a top prospect as a teen, but he has endured tough times. In 2004, he moved to second base to accommodate Kazuo Matsui, with disastrous results. Reyes suffered nagging hamstring injuries and hit .255 in just 53 games. Last year, he recovered and showed a leadoff man's speed, with 60 steals. But he did not have top-of-the-order patience and carried a dreadful .300 OBP.

The Mets have drilled plate discipline into Reyes this year, so much that Randolph openly worried Reyes might start thinking too much and lose his aggressiveness. That has happened only for small stretches. Reyes still has a swinging mentality, but he is getting better at balancing walks, power and bunting.

When it comes to his ability to work a pitcher, Reyes never will match Jeter, one of baseball's best. But he is improving. "That is something that I worked on with Rickey," Reyes says. "He told me I can only cause problems when I am on base. It does not matter how I get there."

Except for discipline with the bat (and salary—Jeter signed a 10-year, $184 million deal in 2001; Reyes signed a four-year, $23.25 million contract last month) Reyes comes out as the better player, at least in the categories on most scouting reports. Jeter has speed, but Reyes is faster—he leads the N.L. in steals and triples. Jeter makes marvelous plays at shortstop, but Reyes covers more ground. Jeter has power to the alleys and is averaging 16.6 homers. Reyes has 19 homers this year and will continue to develop a power stroke that likely will have him consistently near 25.

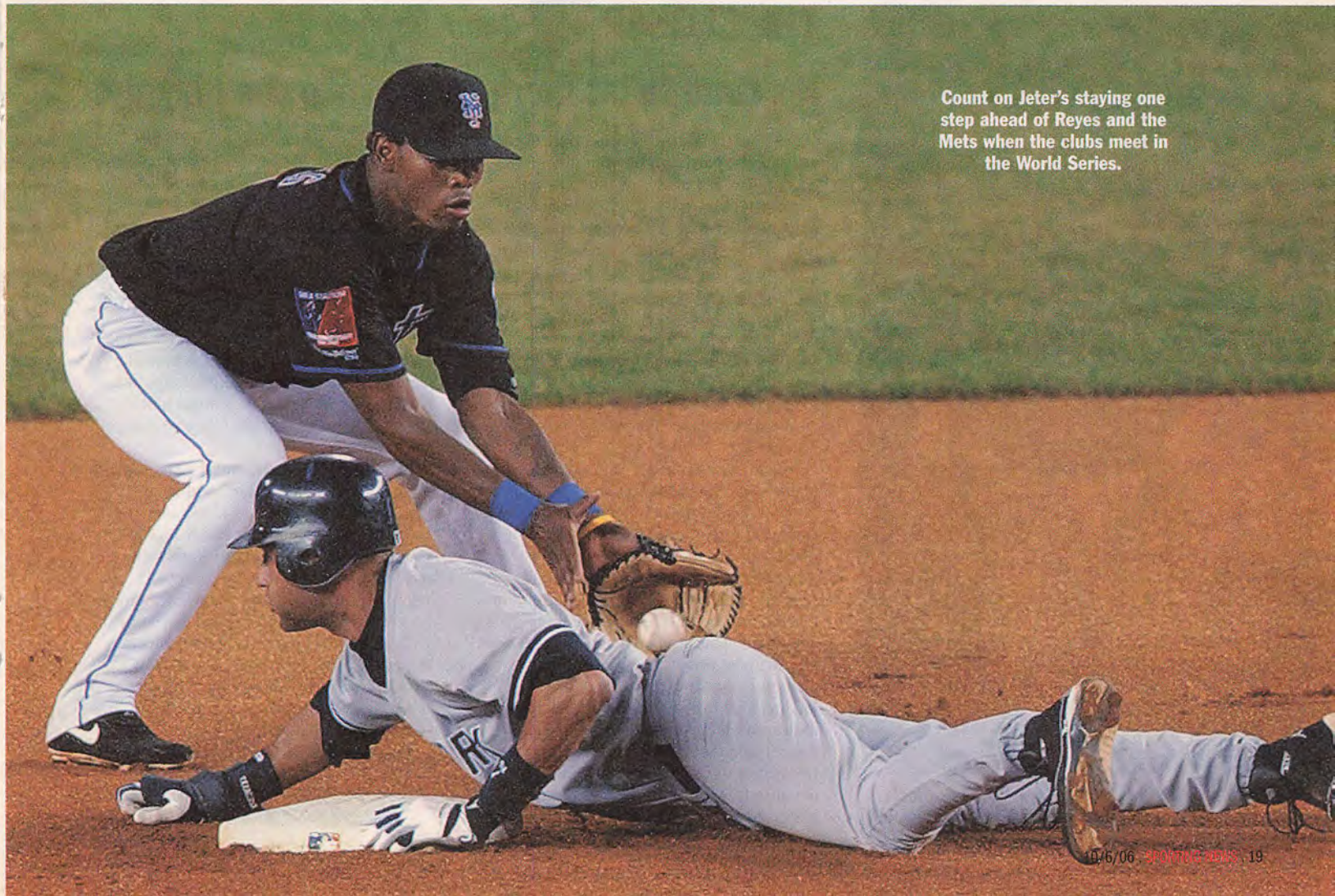
"If you were to just write up a report on them after watching for a week, you'd have to say Reyes does more," says one National League scout. "He does so many things that can disrupt your pitching and defense. He is faster; he hits for better power. But that's the thing about Jeter. Most people can't see all the little things he does."

Such as his sense of timing. He has a knack for knowing what his team needs and when. This season, Jeter knew he'd have to be better after the injuries to Matsui and Sheffield, and he responded with an MVP-worthy performance. He is hitting .325 in close-and-late situations, .383 with runners in scoring position and .371 with runners in scoring position and two outs.

Reyes, too, has become an excellent situational hitter. He's batting .267 in close-and-late situations, .336 with runners in scoring position and .412 with runners in scoring position and two outs. Those, however, are regular-season numbers. Mets fans, who watched Jeter bat .409 with five extra-base hits to take MVP honors in the Yankees' 4-1 Subway Series win in 2000, are familiar with Jeter's postseason exploits. Reyes has no such track record. "With young guys, you never know how they will react to the playoffs and the pressure," Glavine says.

By the time the Yankees reach the World Series, they no doubt will have gotten important plays and big hits from their shortstop. For the Mets to cash in on the promise of this season, they'll need their shortstop to begin forging a Jeter-like playoff reputation—probably against Jeter himself. That's something Reyes can get used to.

"The playoffs," he said, smiling and sticky with dried beer. "I can't wait." **SN**



Count on Jeter's staying one step ahead of Reyes and the Mets when the clubs meet in the World Series.

The power of pinstripes

Every player in the order has been an All-Star. The team leads the majors in arguably the two most important offensive stats—runs and on-base percentage. It ran away with the A.L. East title. And guess what? The Yankees' lineup just now is reaching full strength. Though only Hideki Matsui and Jason Giambi (not including Bobby Abreu's brief appearance) have better career batting averages in the postseason than in the regular season, New York's projected playoff lineup has shown enough power, speed and patience in the postseason to dominate October. —*S.M.*

Career playoff statistics	CF Johnny Damon	SS Derek Jeter	RF Bobby Abreu	3B Alex Rodriguez	DH Jason Giambi	1B Gary Sheffield	LF Hideki Matsui	C Jorge Posada	2B Robinson Cano
AB	145	462	3	118	123	149	135	293	19
R	21	81	0	19	17	26	22	38	3
H	41	142	1	36	37	39	43	67	5
HR	4	16	0	6	6	6	6	8	0
RBI	13	47	0	15	16	18	25	29	5
Avg.	.283	.307	.333	.305	.301	.262	.319	.229	.263
Little-known postseason stat	12-for-40 (.300) at Yankee Stadium	.244 average with runners in scoring position	The hit came off Greg Maddux in 1997 when Abreu was an Astros rookie	Average is the same as his career regular-season mark	Has more walks (28) than strikeouts (24) and a .432 OBP	Only two homers in 69 at-bats with the Yankees	Batting .500 (15-for-30) against lefthanders	Past five homers have been with no one on base	Had a 3-run double in his first at-bat

FRANK FRANKLIN II / AP

Nevin and the Twins would have nailed down a postseason berth much earlier with a larger field.

THE CLOSER Todd Jones

It's time to let more teams into the playoffs

The purists think otherwise, but I think it's a shame the playoffs are not more encompassing. Purists say that only the strong should survive. They'd be happy if only one team from each league made the postseason, which is the way it was before 1969. Purists fought Bud Selig for the longest time on the idea of adding wild-card teams.

But whaddaya know? The addition of wild cards has done exactly what it was supposed to do—keep more teams in pennant races and give more fans a chance to experience a playoff atmosphere. It's no surprise attendance records are being set every year.

Now there are purists who say wild-card teams should be penalized in the playoffs. They want wild cards to have fewer home games. They want division winners to be rewarded with more than a one-game home-field advantage.

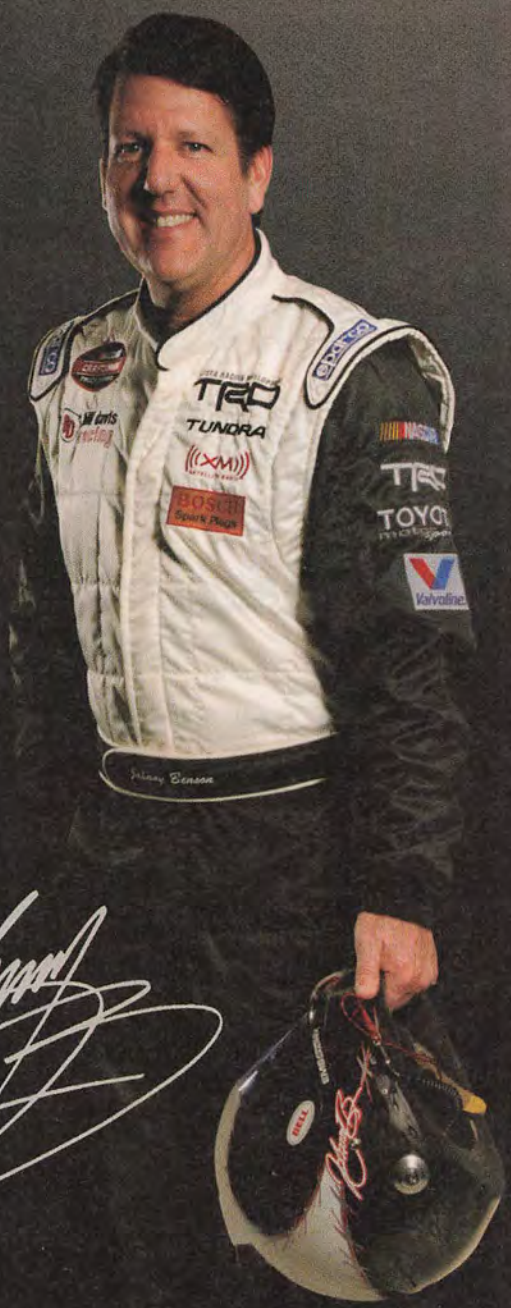
Well, a team should not be penalized for making the playoffs. It's not as if the wild-card teams are bad teams that sneaked into the postseason. Like the division winners, wild cards play 162 games over 180 days against the same competition. Heck, look at the N.L. West winners last year. The Padres won the division and they finished two games over .500. They weren't penalized. The wild cards always finish better than two games over .500. The Giants won 103 games in 1993, the last season before wild cards, and didn't even make the playoffs. Think they wish there had been a wild card then?

Purists say the beauty of baseball is the long season and the fact not everybody makes the postseason. I'd like the purists to talk to Carlos Delgado or Phil Nevin. See the big smiles on their faces. They've both played longer than 10 years and this is the first time either has reached the playoffs. They've done some wonderful things in their careers, but when it comes down to it players are judged by what they've done in the postseason.

Here's what I say: Expand the postseason. Shorten the regular season, add teams to the playoffs, and give the division winners a bye. Only the purists follow a team from April to October, anyway. Everybody knows that after football season begins, baseball's regular season is pushed to the back burner. Surely someone smarter than I can come up with a formula for getting more teams into the postseason. It doesn't have to be like the NBA or NHL, where pretty much everyone has a shot. There has to be a middle ground that would make everyone happy.

Everyone except the purists, of course.

E-mail Todd Jones, a reliever for the Tigers, at tjones@sportingnews.com.



BENSON DOMINATES IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

GOOD?? JOHNNY BE GREAT.

Leading an impressive 145 of 200 laps, Johnny Benson and his Bill Davis Racing Toyota Certified Used Vehicles Tundra took the checkered flag at New Hampshire. It was Benson's fourth NCTS victory of the season, all of which have come within the last nine races. Polesitter Mike Skinner, also in a Bill Davis Racing Tundra, finished second. Overall, Toyota Tundras captured four of the top five spots. To Johnny, his crew and the entire Bill Davis Racing team, congratulations on a well-deserved victory! toyota.com/NCTS

NASCAR CRAFTSMAN TRUCK SERIES

The NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series is a trademark owned by the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, Inc., and Sears, Roebuck and Co. © 2006 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

TOYOTA | *moving forward*

Instantexpert

Your cheat sheet for the playoffs

Ranking the contenders

TODD WARSHAW FOR SN

ROTATION

1. Only when you're the **Yankees** can Randy Johnson be your No. 3 starter.
2. The **Padres** have the N.L.'s deepest rotation, and **Jake Peavy** can be nasty.
3. If Rich Harden returns to 100 percent—no sure thing—the **Athletics** will be No. 1.
4. The **Dodgers** have three solid veterans who have started a World Series game.
5. **Tigers**' starters have a major league-best 3.90 ERA, but Justin Verlander, Nate Robertson and Jeremy Bonderman have faded.

OFFENSE

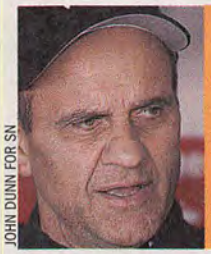
1. This could be the strongest lineup in **Yankees** history. Seriously.
2. The **Mets** mash like an A.L. club.
3. Led by **Joe Mauer**, three **Twins** regulars are hitting better than .300.
4. Ryan Howard and Chase Utley anchor a potent **Phillies** attack.
5. The **Dodgers** don't have a lot of power but hit for a high average and steal bases.

JAY DROWNS / SN

BOB LEVERONE / SN

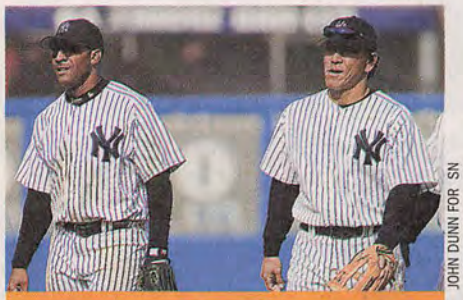
BULLPEN

1. The **Twins**' Joe Nathan and Dennys Reyes both have ERAs under 2.00.
2. The **Padres** have quality arms, and Trevor Hoffman has been efficient.
3. Mariano Rivera's iffy elbow makes the **Yankees** a little more vulnerable.
4. The **Mets** have **Billy Wagner** for the ninth and a reliable crew for the eighth.
5. Sorry, Tigers fans, but the **Athletics**' bullpen is deeper.


JOHN DUNN FOR SN

MANAGER

1. No one is better at keeping the heat off of his players than the Yankees' **Joe Torre**.
2. **Jim Leyland** has done wonders with the Tigers, and he has a World Series ring.
3. The Padres' **Bruce Bochy** is the best there is at managing a bullpen.
4. **Ron Gardenhire** has excelled at guiding the Twins through less than ideal circumstances.
5. You can say the same about the Athletics' **Ken Macha**.


JOHN DUNN FOR SN

DEFENSE

1. The **Athletics** have plus defenders at second and third base and in center and right field.
2. The **Padres** have the best outfield.
3. The **Twins** are especially strong up the middle.
4. The **Dodgers**, as Greg Maddux notes, have guys who have played shortstop all over the infield.
5. The **Cardinals** have allowed the fewest unearned runs, but their outfield will be suspect if **Jim Edmonds** can't go.

TOM GANNAM / AP

MOJO

1. Paul Lo Duca's wisecracking helps the **Mets** have an all-for-one attitude.
2. The **Twins** refused to give up when they were buried.
3. A laid-back clubhouse is an **Athletics** trademark.
4. The **Padres** call San Diego home, so they have no reason to complain about anything.
5. The returns of **Gary Sheffield** and **Hideki Matsui** give the **Yankees** a lift, though they don't need one. *—Stan McNeal*

SNumbers

0
Wild-card teams from the A.L. Central before this season.

3 Saves—none since the first week in August—by Cardinals other than Jason Isringhausen, whose season is over. Rookie Adam Wainwright or Braden Looper likely will get the chance to close games.

JEFF LEWIS / AP

4
Ex-Braves who have key roles with the Dodgers—RHP **Greg Maddux**, SS Rafael Furcal, RF J.D. Drew and 3B Wilson Betemit. So Braves fans still have a reason to not cheer in October (after all, they have a reputation to uphold).

5 Teams heading to the postseason that did not make it last year.

7 Athletics regulars with a batting average of less than .280.

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

1,703
Regular-season games played by Mets first baseman **Carlos Delgado** before one of his teams qualified for the postseason. *(See Mike Berardino's column on Page 54.)*

JOSEPH OLIVER / AP

1
Twins player with 30 home runs in a season since 1987. **Justin Morneau** entered the week with 33.

Postseason schedule

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		3 ALDS (G1) ALDS (G1) NLDS (G1)	4 ALDS (G2) ALDS (G2) NLDS (G1)	5 NLDS (G2) NLDS (G2)	6 ALDS (G3) ALDS (G3)	7 *ALDS (G4) *ALDS (G4) NLDS (G3) NLDS (G3)
8 *ALDS (G5) *ALDS (G5) *NLDS (G4) *NLDS (G4)	9 *NLDS (G5) *NLDS (G5)	10 ALCS (G1)	11 ALCS (G2) NLCS (G1)	12 NLCS (G2)	13 ALCS (G3)	14 ALCS (G4) NLCS (G3)
15 *ALCS (G5) NLCS (G4)	16 *NLCS (G5)	17 *ALCS (G6)	18 *ALCS (G7) *NLCS (G6)	19 *NLCS (G7)	20	21 WS (G1)
22 WS (G2)	23	24 WS (G3)	25 WS (G4)	26 *WS (G5)	27	28 *WS (G6)
29 *WS (G7)	30	31	OCTOBER			

*If necessary

Believe it —or not

Plenty of postseason "truisms" will be trotted out until the end of the World Series, but in reality some of the better-known ones aren't all that true.

Truism: Teams that have momentum going into the playoffs are dangerous.
Reality: Since the start of the expanded postseason in 1995, the playoff team with the best winning percentage in its league during the regular season's final two weeks has advanced to the World Series six times. The teams with the worst percentage? Six times, too.

Truism: Home-field advantage is crucial.
Reality: Since 1995, home teams are 6-7 in Game 5s of League Division Series, 3-2 in Game 7s of League Championship Series and 191-169 overall for a winning percentage of .531. You might as well flip a coin to predict who will come out on top.

Truism: Pitching wins championships.
Reality: This one does have a ring of truth. Of the 11 World Series winners since 1995, five had postseason ERAs under 3.00. But four had ERAs over 4.00, including the vaunted 2004 Red Sox.

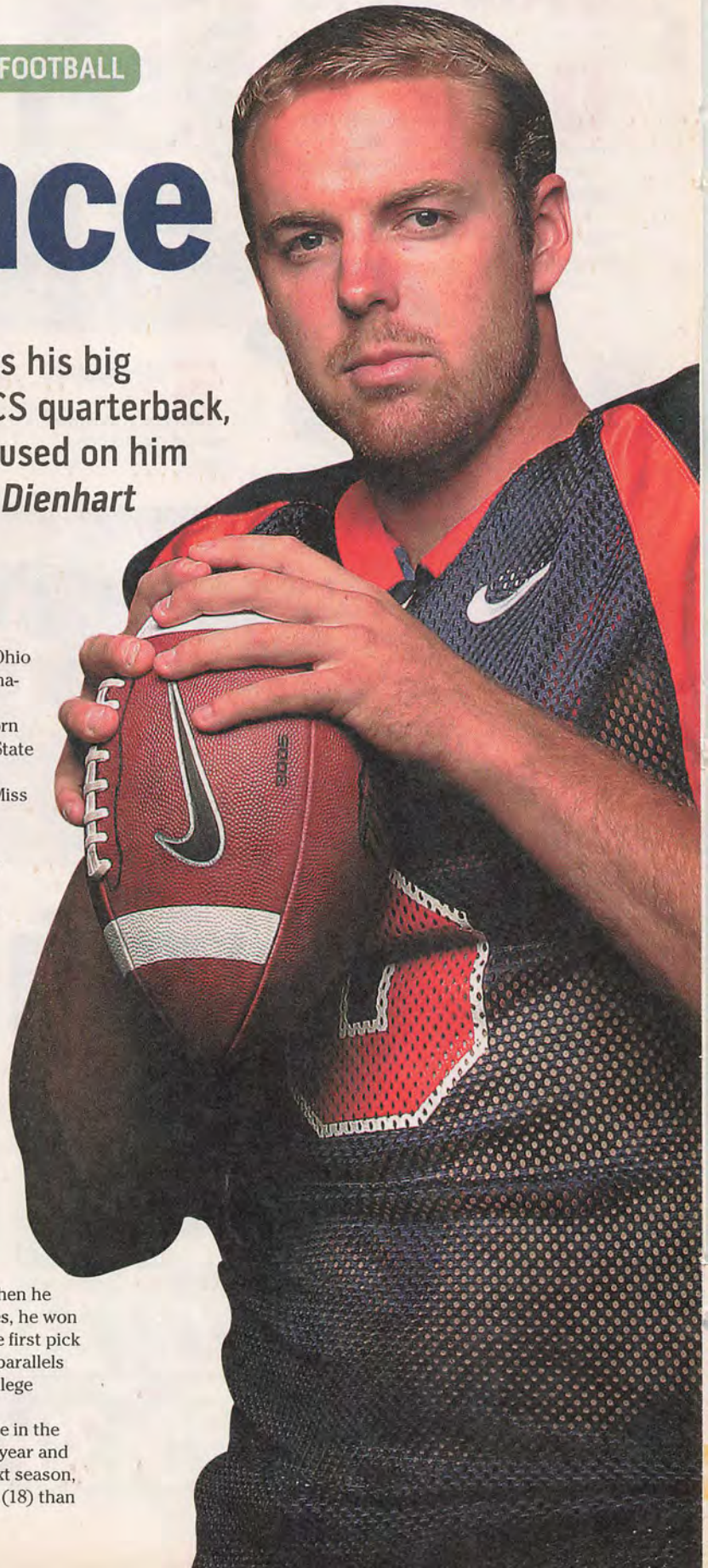
So, what *can* you take to the bank? If a team goes up 2-0 in a series, it almost always closes the deal. Since '95, those teams have won 35 of 41 series (85.4 percent). So does that mean if a team splits on the road to start a series, it has a great shot at advancing? Um, no: Those teams have won only 19 of 36 series. Just another tossup. Or crapshoot. —*Tom Gatto*

Miner difference

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

UTEP's JORDAN PALMER isn't as good as his big brother—yet—but he is the best non-BCS quarterback, and that's enough to keep NFL eyes focused on him

By Tom Dienhart



"You suck!"

Wait—it gets better.

"You won't ever be as good as your brother!"

That one is pretty good.

Welcome to Jordan Palmer's world.

"I get stuff from fans and other players all the time," he says. "It cracks me up."

It's good he can laugh about it because this is his reality as the quarterback for the UTEP Miners. This is what it's like being the "other" Palmer, the kid known—for now—as the little brother of Cincinnati Bengals star quarterback Carson Palmer. But let's affix another label to Jordan Palmer. Let's call him the best senior NFL quarterback prospect at a non-BCS school. That's what most early draft boards say, too.

You've never heard of Jordan Palmer? Understandable. He is neatly tucked away in a deep, dark, far western corner of Texas. It's the perfect place for the little brother of the NFL's hottest young passer to matriculate in peace. Well, relative peace.

"He's handled it all phenomenally," says Carson. "It definitely has been tough on him, and he's got a lot of expectations—a lot of pressure on his shoulders."

If recent history has shown us anything, it's that we should pay attention to these quarterbacks who work on the shadowy fringes of college football. Guys from Miami of Ohio (Ben Roethlisberger), Louisiana-Lafayette (Jake Delhomme), Delaware (Rich Gannon), Alcorn State (Steve McNair), Fresno State (Trent Dilfer), Northern Iowa (Kurt Warner) and Southern Miss (Brett Favre) have quarterbacked teams to the Super Bowl over the previous 10 seasons.

Not impressed? In addition to Favre, Roethlisberger, Delhomme, McNair and Warner, eight other former non-BCS quarterbacks are starting for NFL teams this fall (*see chart on page 26*). That's 40.6 percent of NFL starters. Lay that fast fact on your buddies at the bar and you just might get a free brewski.

Is Jordan Palmer the second coming of Carson Palmer? Maybe, maybe not. But remember this: Carson had his share of detractors when he was at Southern California. Yes, he won the 2002 Heisman and was the first pick in the 2003 draft, but several parallels can be drawn between his college career and Jordan's.

Carson broke his collarbone in the third game of his sophomore year and ended up redshirting. The next season, he tossed more interceptions (18) than

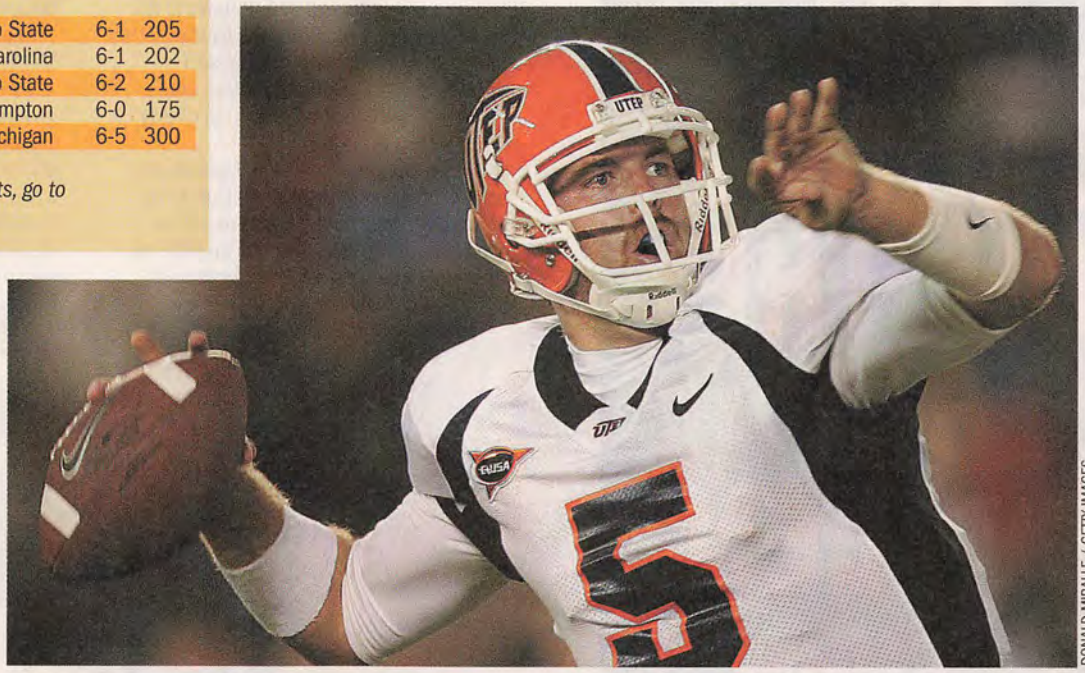
Five to watch (besides Palmer)

War Room scouts' top-ranked senior NFL draft prospects from non-BCS schools:

1. Marcus McCauley	CB	Fresno State	6-1	205
2. Aundrae Allison	WR	East Carolina	6-1	202
3. Paul Williams	WR	Fresno State	6-2	210
4. Travarous Bain	CB	Hampton	6-0	175
5. Joe Staley	OT	Central Michigan	6-5	300

For more draft info from War Room scouts, go to sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom.

Palmer throws a lot of interceptions, but he wins a lot of games, too.



DONALD MIRALLE / GETTY IMAGES

MARK LAMBIE / EL PASO TIMES

touchdowns (16). Entering his senior season, Carson had 39 touchdowns and 39 interceptions. The point: He was considered an underachiever until his final season of glory.

Unlike Carson, Jordan was not a blue-chip recruit. No. 1, his Mission Viejo (Calif.) team rarely passed. No. 2—and this is a biggie—he played quarterback full time only during his senior year.

Before that, Palmer had been a receiver. The quarterback, Billy Hart, went on to sign with USC. When Palmer took over in 2001, he learned from one of the best: coach Bob Johnson, a renowned quarterback guru and the father of former NFL quarterback Rob Johnson. With little experience and pedestrian statistics, well, let's just say Palmer didn't arrive in a limo for a news conference to announce his college choice.

Once at UTEP, Palmer broke his collarbone as a freshman and then was limited to six starts as a redshirt freshman because of knee and rib injuries. Another thing that has hindered his development: His first two seasons at UTEP were spent in the previous regime's offense, which asked Palmer to run the option on occasion.

"I had no business doing that," he says.

Enter coach Mike Price, thank goodness. His passer-friendly spread attack has been a boon to Jordan, just as the arrival of coach Pete Carroll and offensive coordinator Norm Chow boosted Carson. Thanks to Price, Jordan no longer locks on receivers, holds the ball too long or telegraphs throws. The result: He's UTEP's all-time leader in passing yards, attempts, completions and touchdown passes. This year, Palmer has completed 80 of 116 passes for 758 yards and seven touchdowns for the 1-2 Miners. Oh, and he also has tossed six interceptions.

Those dang interceptions. They're an albatross, the starting and finishing point of many conversations about Palmer. There's no hiding the fact he has the dubious distinction of being the nation's active leader in career interceptions, 56. Explain yourself, Jordan, because the NFL soon will be asking questions.

"We spread it and throw it in this offense," he says. "And we're going to throw digs and outs on third-and-long. We aren't going to run a draw on third-and-long like they do in the NFL. We continue to go forward and press. That will account for some of the picks.

"Tips are other ones. And I've made some bad decisions, whether it was greed or lack of focus. I have limited my dumb mistakes this year."

Scouts have their eyes on

Small programs, big pipelines

These programs have produced the most NFL draft picks among non-BCS schools since 1998, the first year of the BCS:

Source: NFL.com

GOT CAUGHT ON THE BIG SCREEN

(PICKING A WINNER)

ALWAYS SMOOTH

EVEN WHEN YOU'RE NOT

www.keystonelightbeer.com

21 MEANS 21®

©2006 COORS BREWING COMPANY
GOLDEN, COLORADO 80401 • BEER • CKY003050

other non-BCS quarterbacks, too—seniors such as Houston's Kevin Kolb, Nevada's Jeff Rowe, BYU's John Beck, Akron's Luke Getsy, Boise State's Jared Zabransky and Tulane's Lester Ricard. Still, Palmer is the non-glamour boy quarterback to watch this season because of his potential and production. His famous bloodline helps, but that same bloodline draws an overly critical eye.

"Even though he looks like Carson, he doesn't have the natural skills that jump out at you," one NFL team's director of college scouting says. "He has an OK arm with better short-range velocity than he gets on deep balls."

There are other things scouts like about Jordan. He's a pocket passer and a good game manager who has been a major factor in helping UTEP become a winning program. No easy task. And at 6-5, 235, he passes the eyeball test.

"I went, '*Wow,*' the first time I met him," UTEP coach Mike Price says.

And Price knows quarterbacks, having groomed Drew Bledsoe, Ryan Leaf and Jason Gesser, among others, while coaching at Washington State.

So, where will Palmer be drafted? Right now, he looks like a first-day pick. But much depends on how he does the rest of this season, at the NFL Scouting Combine and during individual workouts.

The NFL is watching—and waiting. **SN**

Roethlisberger led his team to the MAC championship before winning a Super Bowl with the Steelers.

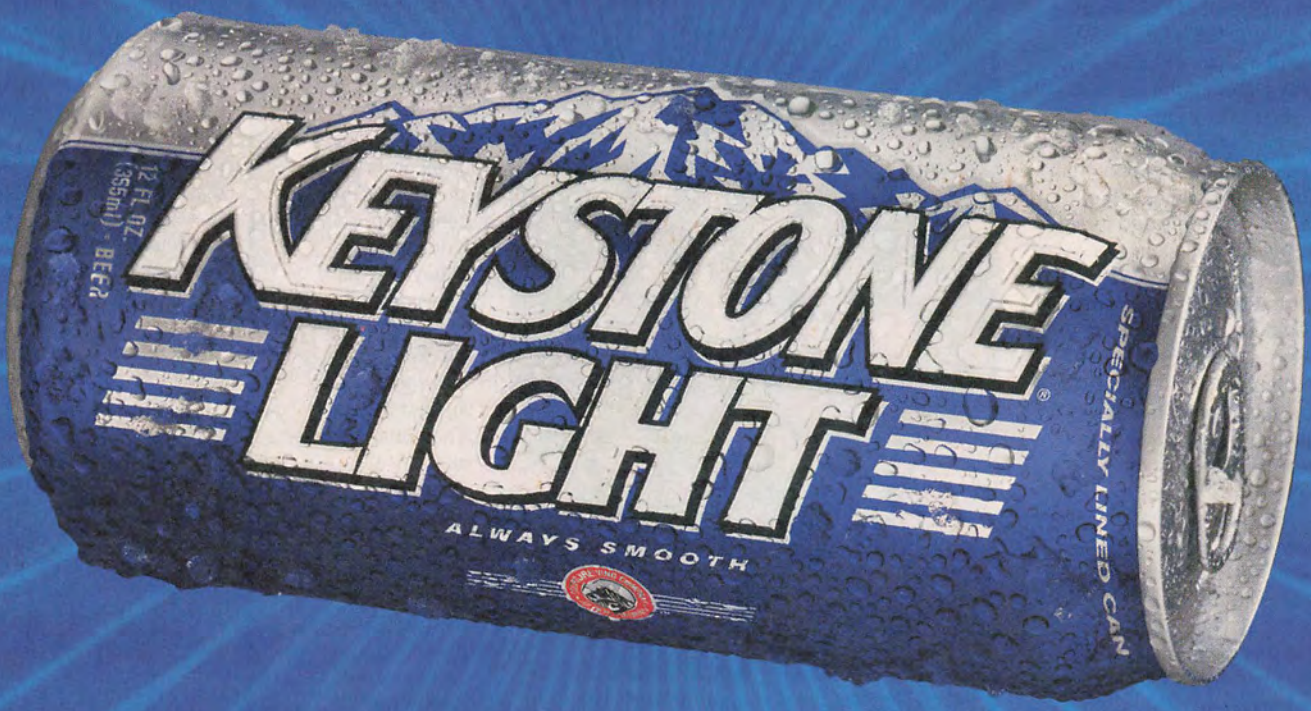
ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Current NFL starters from non-BCS schools

Quarterback	School	Drafted (round, year)
David Carr, Texans	Fresno State	First, 2002
Daunte Culpepper, Dolphins	Central Florida	First, 1999
Jake Delhomme, Panthers	Louisiana-Lafayette	Undrafted, 1997
Brett Favre, Packers	Southern Miss	Second, 1991
Charlie Frye, Browns	Akron	Third, 2005
Jon Kitna, Lions	Central Washington	Undrafted, 1996
Byron Leftwich, Jaguars	Marshall	First, 2003
J.P. Losman, Bills	Tulane	First, 2004
Steve McNair, Ravens	Alcorn State	First, 1995
Chad Pennington, Jets	Marshall	First, 2000
Ben Roethlisberger, Steelers	Miami (Ohio)	First, 2004
Alex Smith, 49ers	Utah	First, 2005
Kurt Warner, Cardinals	Northern Iowa	Undrafted, 1994

CAUGHT A LINE DRIVE

(RIGHT IN THE JUNK)



ALWAYS SMOOTH

EVEN WHEN YOU'RE NOT

www.keystonelightbeer.com

21 MEANS 21®

©2006 COORS BREWING COMPANY, GOLDEN, COLORADO 80401 • BEER • CKY003050

INSIDER DAN POMPEI

presented by JIM BEAM

dpompei@sportingnews.com

You might stand a chance of going around Jacksonville's defense, but it's awfully tough to go through it.

Jaguars 'D' needs to add bustle to its muscle

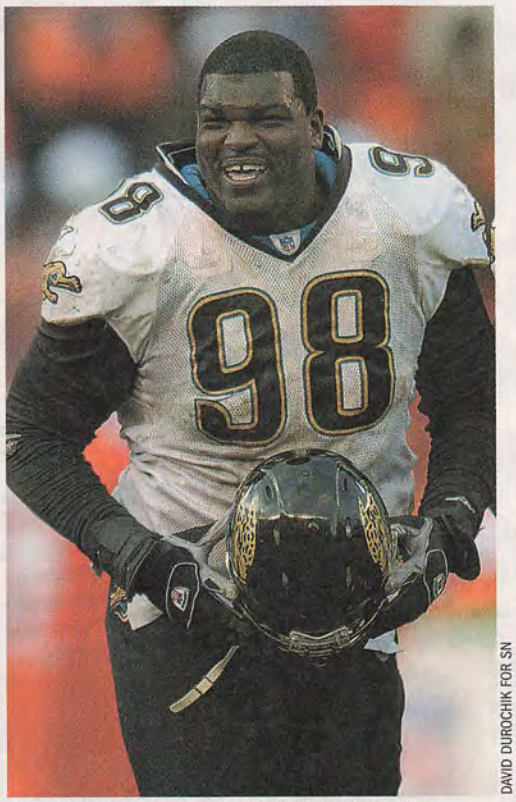
So the coronation of the NFL's new defensive kings will have to be put on hold. The Jaguars' defense wasn't quite as dominating against the Colts as it had been six nights earlier against the Steelers.

It really shouldn't have come as a surprise. The Jaguars match up better against an offense that tries to outpound opponents than it does against an offense that spreads out defenders and forces them to play a shell game.

If the Jaguars had not lost end Reggie Hayward for the season, they would have had a chance to field a really special defense. Without him, they don't have the flash to go along with the muscle. They have replaced Hayward with converted defensive tackle Rob Meier (6-5, 293), an industrious pass rusher who lacks Hayward's explosiveness and doesn't play up to his size.

This is what the Jaguars' defense has going for it: size and power. In an era when many NFL defenses are downsizing, the Jaguars have gone XXXL. CBS analyst Phil Simms made the observation that this defense is "bigger than anyone they play."

According to information obtained from the NFL, the Jaguars' starting defense averages 252.45 pounds, which makes it the second-heaviest to the Cowboys' "D" (252.54-pound average). At 6-7, 325, defensive tackle John Henderson skews the Jaguars' average.



DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN

A Secret Service agent couldn't protect the Jaguars' linebackers any better than Henderson.

For the Jags, it still begins with the two massive men in the middle—Henderson and 6-6, 306-pound Marcus Stroud. "They are the cornerstone of what we do," coach Jack Del Rio says.

With Stroud and Henderson occupying every inch between the offensive tackles, the linebackers are protected more than the guy in the White House. And they have proved much more adept at tracking down the enemy.

"Their front seven is as good as it gets," Colts center Jeff Saturday says. "They play hard. Their defensive tackles are tough. Their ends play well against the run. Their linebackers all run well. There is no weakness to run at."

When Del Rio took over this team in 2003, he promised the Jaguars would be known for playing physical defense. He has kept his promise. During his tenure, the Jaguars have allowed fewer yards than all but six teams. They figure to be among the league leaders in that category again this season. The question is whether they will be among the defensive leaders in big plays.

They never have been a big

speedreads

It's too early for coaches such as Jeff Fisher, Joe Gibbs, Mike Shanahan and Mike McCarthy to panic. They need to stick with their quarterbacks and try to make it easier for them to succeed. The quarterbacks who started the season for those teams are the best bets to win games. Throw a rookie or a young quarterback in now and it's going to be a long, long year.

The Jets have a real problem trying to run a 3-4: They have no nose tackle. Dewayne Robertson is a good player helplessly out of position. He needs to be with another team.

OK, so say I'm being premature, but I think there isn't a player in the NFL who runs the draw better than Jaguars rookie Maurice Jones-Drew. He's got a little Barry Sanders in him. Maybe quite a bit of Barry Sanders.

Losing a spleen has a way of giving perspective to losing a few games. Here's hoping Chris Simms has a quick recovery and is able to block this September from his memory. He deserves better.

SUBWAY Reggie Bush Fresh Stat Tracker
Check out all the latest Reggie news at:
www.subwayfreshbuzz.com

blitzing team, though they are adept at running what the Colts call a cross blitz, a play in which the middle linebacker and strongside linebacker—or the strongside and weakside 'backers—cross in the middle of the field as they blitz.

By design, the Jaguars prefer to be more meat and potatoes than crepes and frappes. But they might be forced to adjust given their lack of a pass rush. "They are one of the old-school defenses, unlike some of the defenses now that have a lot of guys moving around and a lot of blitzing," Steelers offensive coordinator Ken Whisenhunt says. "They dogged us more than other teams, and I think a lot of that was to try to stop the run game."

The Jaguars might be in better position to take some chances schematically because of cornerback Brian Williams, a free-agent addition from the Vikings. With Williams and cornerback Rashean Mathis, the Jaguars can play more man-to-man, creep the safety into the box and blitz without looking back. "When you have good corners, it frees you up," Del Rio says. "Brian Williams solidifies the secondary. That was the thought behind getting him. He's more of a complete player than we had. But we are not asking him to be a savior."

Williams and strong safety Donovin Darius, who missed all but the first two games last season because of a torn ACL, have given the Jaguars better run support from the secondary. Whisenhunt notes the Jaguars "are very aggressive in run support off their coverages, be it man or the seam coverage they play."

The Jaguars' defense at this point is nearly impenetrable against the run but not perfect against the pass. The suspicion is that's going to be good enough to win a lot of games. **SN**

>INSIDE DISH

Though it appears RB **Willie Parker** is emerging as a capable short-yardage back, the Steelers aren't sure whether they have a back who can take **Jerome Bettis'** place as a game-closer. Former Packers RB **Najeh Davenport** could take that role. The coaching staff likes the idea of having two backs with varying styles, and Davenport's power could be a nice complement to Parker's flash. In an ideal world, the Steelers' second back might get 30 percent of the carries. It's also possible the team will decide to split up the responsibility among Parker, Davenport, **Verron Haynes** and **Duce Staley**. > Many were shocked when the Falcons signed K **Morten Andersen** last week, but the move had been in the works for months. Andersen, 46, has a longstanding relationship with coach **Jim Mora** from their days together with the Saints, and they had been in contact in the offseason. Andersen and other veteran kickers worked out for the Falcons before training camp. It was then the Falcons decided if they needed a kicker early in the season, Andersen would be their man. They went so far as to bring in a leftfooted kicker during camp so they could practice the snap and hold in the event they turned to Andersen. When **Michael Koenen** got off to a rocky start—he missed four field-goal attempts in Week 2—the team decided to sign Andersen but allow Koenen to continue to kick off and punt. The Falcons still consider Koenen their kicker of the future, but Anderson, who is 15 months older than Mora and six months younger than G.M. **Rich McKay**, figures to be kicking field goals this season as long as he stays healthy. > The Chargers' young defensive backs have started to play with more consistency and flair this season, and it might have more to do with who is playing with them than anything else. The secondary finally has solid leadership after the free-agent addition of veteran FS **Marlon McCree**. Though McCree isn't among the most physically gifted safeties, he scores high on the intangibles chart. His communication has helped get the Chargers lined up where they are supposed to be, and his work ethic has provided a standard for young defensive backs.

GENE J. PUSKAR / AP

The Steelers want someone to add smash to Parker's flash.

> Seahawks WR **Nate Burleson** has not gotten comfortable in coach Mike Holmgren's offense, but that had nothing to do with the team's interest in former Patriots WR **Deion Branch**. The team still has high hopes for Burleson, a free-agent acquisition in the offseason, and believes he and Branch could make a dynamic combination. The Seahawks needed another young receiver to build around. **Bobby Engram** is 33, and **Darrell Jackson** has a history of inconsistency. It's possible neither will be in Seattle next season. > RB **Reuben Droughns** has not run well for the Browns this season, and there is no good reason for it. Droughns has been a little banged up recently, but even in training camp he did not run with much zip. If Droughns doesn't pick it up, some people might start to question whether the contract extension he signed in the offseason left him a bit complacent. The Browns eventually could turn to rookie RB **Jerome Harrison**, who was impressive in the preseason. > The Cardinals are thinking about having OLB **Karlos Dansby** switch positions. Dansby has played on the strong side, but while he has been slowed by a toe injury, former DE **Calvin Pace** (6-4, 270) has established himself at Dansby's position. Moving Dansby (6-4, 243) to the weak side would enable the Cardinals to get more out of his speed. It also would give them a bigger, stronger group of linebackers that could be much more difficult to run against.

WORKOUT SCHEDULE: Upper body in the morning, legs in the afternoon, jaw muscles at lunch.

Reggie, we're glad to be part of your fitness regime. Happy highlight-making.

SUBWAY® is a registered trademark of Doctor's Associates Inc. ©2006 Doctor's Associates Inc.

SUBWAY eat fresh.

Rex appeal

REX GROSSMAN finally may give the Bears the steady QB play they need to make a championship run *By Brad Biggs*

Usually one to keep his nose out of the newspaper and his ears away from sports talk radio, Rex Grossman could not avoid the clashing opinions circling him all offseason.

The Chicago Bears are set. Grossman is going to be great.

Broken down after two major injuries, he might as well be "Wreck Grossman."

Thing is, no one knew whether the 2003 first-round pick could cut it, even him. In three seasons, he had made a grand total of eight starts while enduring major knee and ankle injuries. "Basically," Grossman says, "they didn't have much to go on."

The Bears are being rewarded for operating on faith. The defending NFC North champions are a force in the conference after defeating previously unbeaten Minnesota, 19-16—their first win at the Metrodome since 2001. That's also the year college scouting director Greg Gabriel stumbled upon Grossman while evaluating South Carolina's defense. Gabriel saw Florida score on its first nine possessions against what he viewed as the nation's best defense that season and knew he had to have the then-sophomore quarterback.

"If this son of a gun is our quarterback right now," Gabriel told a scout that night, "we go to the Super Bowl this year."

Five seasons later, Gabriel's prophecy might come true. With the resurgence of wide receiver Muhsin Muhammad and the emergence of wide receiver Bernard Berrian and tight end Desmond Clark as much-needed targets, Grossman has thrown six touchdowns in three games and has a passer rating of 100.9. The Bears had 11 passing touchdowns all of last season.

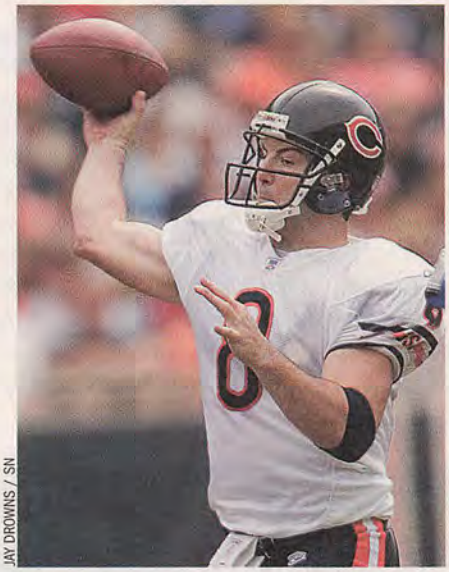
Against a Vikings game plan that called for heavy blitzing, Grossman wasn't as sharp as he had been in his first two games. He was intercepted twice, including one that was returned for a touchdown that put Chicago behind, 13-9. Grossman responded by throwing a 24-yard touchdown pass with less than two minutes remaining—and the Bears had their first 3-0 start since 1991.

The addition of veteran Brian Griese has pushed Grossman, who for the first time since 2001 didn't have to learn a new system in the offseason. His familiarity with coordinator Ron Turner's scheme and ability to play instinctively are big reasons for his improvement.

"I'm sure a lot of people have their doubts," one NFL offensive coordinator says. "I'm sure he still feels a little rusty being in the pocket with a live rush, but I've always thought he was real talented. He's got that quick release. He doesn't settle his feet all the time, but he has a strong arm and plays with a lot of passion and takes calculated risks. He's got big balls."

The Bears have been desperate for an offensive complement to the elite defense built by coach Lovie Smith. They've changed starting quarterbacks 20 times since G.M. Jerry Angelo was hired five years ago. They love Grossman's intangibles, and now he must prove he can stay healthy and be consistent.

"I've really not shown what I am capable of," Grossman says. "It takes a full season. A few games in, I'm trying to gain respect and gain a resume. Lovie has always had my back. I'm trying to earn it." SN



JAY DROWNS / SN

Grossman is trying to make up for lost time as the Bears' field general.

Doctor, doctor, give me the news

Our correspondents made house calls to check in on the quarterbacks returning from major injuries.

Patient: Drew Brees, Saints
Injury: Torn right labrum
Checkup: Nearly back to normal
Prognosis: The injury is no longer a concern, but Brees' timing and strength probably won't be at their peaks until later in the year.

Patient: Daunte Culpepper, Dolphins
Injury: Major knee damage, including a torn ACL
Checkup: Mental hurdles remain
Prognosis: With more playing time, Culpepper's confidence in his knee and new team will increase. For now, it's a struggle.

Patient: Donovan McNabb, Eagles
Injury: Sports hernia
Checkup: Almost as good as new
Prognosis: He certainly is more mobile than he was in 2005. If new wideout Donte' Stallworth and running back Brian Westbrook can stay on the field, McNabb will return to the Pro Bowl.

Patient: Carson Palmer, Bengals
Injury: Major knee damage, including a torn ACL
Checkup: Healthy and hasn't missed a beat
Prognosis: Palmer is showing good mobility and is a good bet for his second straight Pro Bowl appearance.

Patient: Chad Pennington, Jets
Injury: Torn right rotator cuff
Checkup: Back to his 2004 throwing form—before his injury
Prognosis: He could be a candidate for Comeback Player of the Year, but the lack of a running game will hurt him.

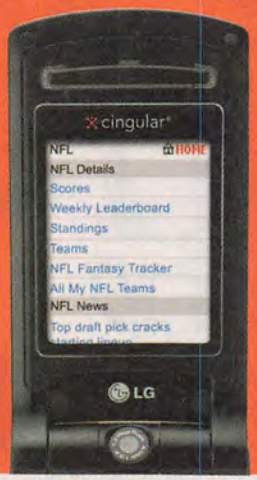
Patient: Ben Roethlisberger, Steelers
Injury: Broken nose, jaw and orbital bone; appendicitis
Checkup: Only lingering issue is slight stomach soreness
Prognosis: Fatigue is a concern because of the weight he has lost. Another concern: 0 TD passes, 5 picks so far.

FS WEEK 4 STUDS ***QB:*** Donovan McNabb, Eagles ▸ Kurt Warner, Cardinals ▸ Marc Bulger, Rams ***RB:*** Larry Johnson, Chiefs ▸ LaMont Jordan, Raiders ▸

Fantasy Source Football, your online fantasy authority: fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl.

Without up-to-the-minute NFL scores, top NCAA Football® coverage, and pro fantasy football, you are just some

MANIACAL ZOMBIE.



Get closer to football.

No other wireless carrier keeps you closer to football by delivering in-depth analysis from HBO Sports' Bob Costas, Cris Collinsworth, and Cris Carter on HBO Mobile℠. With Cingular's MEdia™ Net, you're never too far from the action with NFL and NCAA scores, highlights, and behind-the-scenes video news and analysis from ESPN. Plus, have a blast with extras like mobile games, ringtones, and gameday performances of all of your top pro fantasy football players.

cingular
raising the bar

Standard usage rates apply, depending on your plan. See www.cingular.com/media/media_net for terms and conditions. Other licenses or trademarks are property of their respective holders. Cingular Wireless is the exclusive wireless partner of the NCAA® and NCAA Football.® NCAA and NCAA Football are trademarks of their respective owners. HBO Sports® and HBO Mobile℠ are trademarks of Home Box Office, Inc. ©2006 Cingular Wireless. All rights reserved.

Fantasy Source

Advice from a Founding Father

'Wise men don't need advice. Fools won't take it.'

By Rob Hurtt

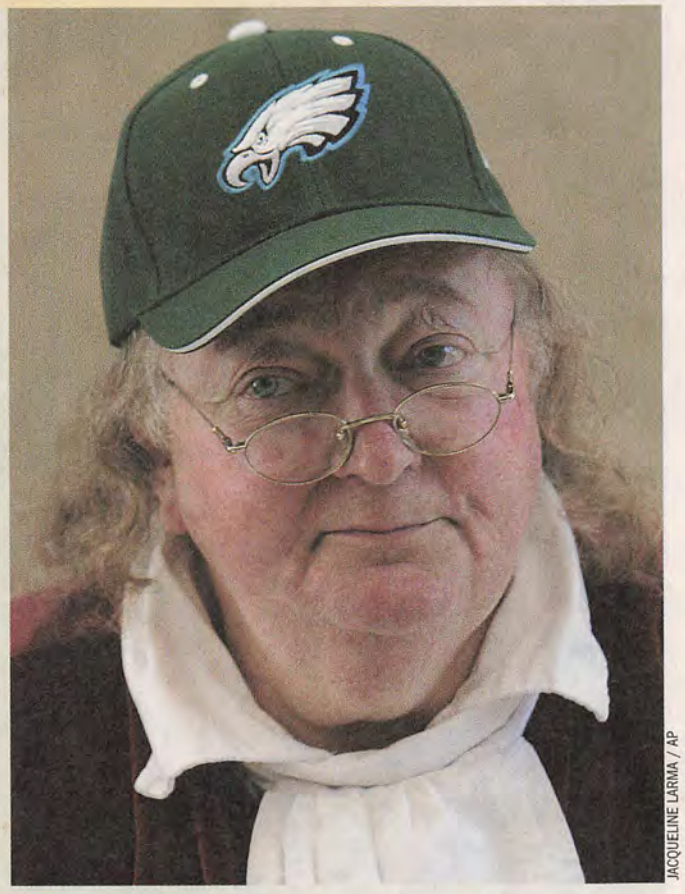
Curmudgeons swear that fantasy is besmirching their beloved game of football. They also maintain that their warriors clad in leather helmets were better than the athletes of today and that the horse-and-buggy combo worked just fine. Who needs stinking automobiles?

Benjamin Franklin would shake his head in disgust at such closed-minded thinking. Yeah, that Ben Franklin, the one who would have celebrated his 300th birthday this year. He was anything but old-school, though.

The original Big Ben was a writer, publisher, statesman, scientist, inventor, postmaster, abolitionist, firefighter … and fantasy owner. What, you don't believe that New England's original patriots played fantasy football? Sure, football wasn't invented until more than 100 years later, but fantasy owners have overcome greater difficulties, such as life before real-time scoring.

If you don't buy that Franklin was a fantasy fanatic, I guess you're not ready for this little colonial secret: The first fantasy football advice printed in the Americas was *Poor Richard's Almanack*. The most obvious bit of evidence is Franklin's famous aphorism: "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man miss the second half on Monday night."

I'm telling you, his writings ooze fantasy advice.



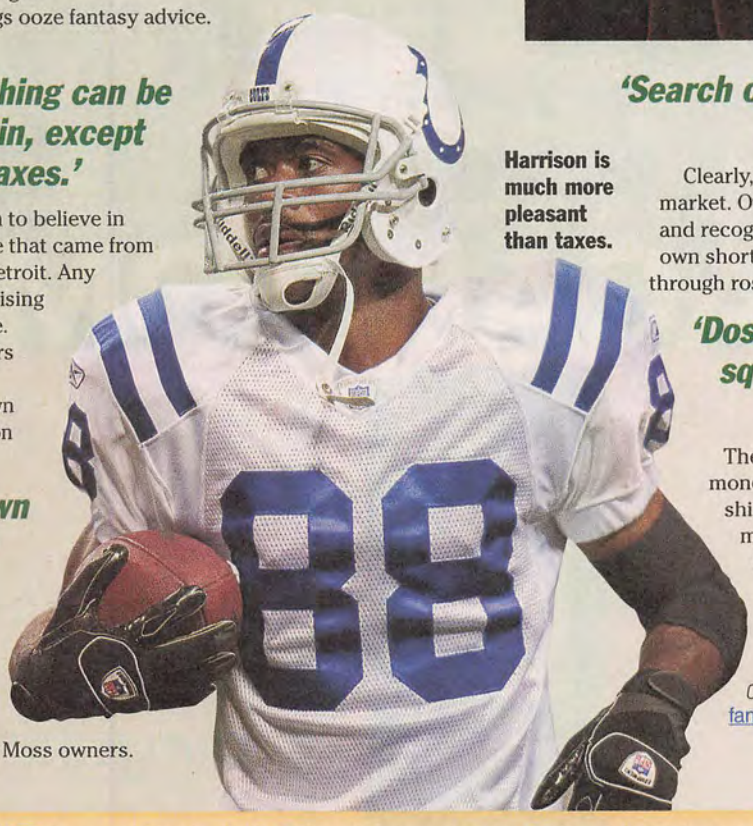
JACQUELINE LARMA / AP

'In the world, nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.'

Franklin knew better than to believe in guarantees, especially those that came from mouthy wide receivers in Detroit. Any player or team can be surprising or disappointing at any time. The key is finding the players who perform well consistently. A 10-touchdown season from Marvin Harrison is a virtual certainty.

'He that lieth down with dogs shall rise up with fleas.'

Owners who drafted T.O.? B.F. would shout, "That's what you get!" The same applies to you, Randy Moss owners.



Harrison is much more pleasant than taxes.

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

'Search others for their virtues, thyself for thy vices.'

Clearly, he's talking about analyzing the trade market. Owners need to see other teams' strengths and recognize how those teams match up with their own shortcomings. Franklin never looked at his team through rose-colored bifocals.

'Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that's the stuff life is made of.'

There also is that other famous saying: Time is money. For Benjamin, it was all about the shillings. Sure, every owner needs a Monday morning "coffee break," but do be reasonable. Employers (and significant others) generally don't look kindly upon spending 45 minutes researching which kicker to add during your starter's week off.

Our experts regularly share their wisdom at fantasysource.sportingnews.com/nfl.

FS Chester Taylor, Vikings **WR:** Anquan Boldin, Cardinals ▸ Chris Chambers, Dolphins ▸ Donald Driver, Packers ▸ Randy Moss, Raiders **TE:** Kellen Winslow, Browns ▸

FANTASY DISH

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

The Jags will test Portis in Week 4.

RB **Clinton Portis** rushed for 86 yards and two scores against the Texans in his return from injury, but don't look for a repeat against the Jaguars this week. Dallas, Pittsburgh and Indianapolis averaged 126.2 rushing yards in the games in which they didn't play against Jacksonville. The Jaguars held the three teams to an average of 59 yards rushing. > A player to watch who probably is on your free-agent wire: RB **Najeh Davenport**. The Steelers acquired him for one reason: to fill **Jerome Bettis**' short-yardage role. **Duce Staley** has been inactive the past two weeks, and the Steelers don't want to wear out **Willie Parker**. > Since the start of the 2005 season, the Texans have held an opponent to fewer than 300 net yards just once. Houston has allowed more than 400 yards in nine of the 19 games it has played in that span. By comparison, the Bears have held opponents under 300 yards in 14 of their past 20 games and have not allowed a 400-plus game. > Carolina's **Steve Smith** came back from injury in a big way (seven catches, 112 yards) and taught us a lesson. Pregame reports had Smith playing sparingly, and many owners left him on their benches. RB **Ahman Green**, TE **Todd Heap** and WRs **Laveranues Coles** and **T.J. Houshmandzadeh** also got game-time green lights and performed well. If a stud is going to play, he must be in your lineup. *—Brendan Roberts*

Find or Fluke?

Analyzing WEEK 3's breakout performers.

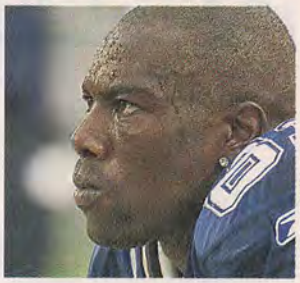
DARRON CUMMINGS / AP

Maurice Jones-Drew, RB, Jaguars. Jones-Drew was impressive as a complementary back to Fred Taylor. Jones-Drew piled up 103 yards rushing, 32 yards receiving and a touchdown against the Colts. It's important to note that Indianapolis was without run stuffers Corey Simon and Bob Sanders, but Jones-Drew showed good burst through the line as well as the speed necessary to get outside. Taylor's injury history should make Jones-Drew even more appealing to fantasy owners. **Ruling:** Find.

DAVID DUPREY / AP

Roscoe Parrish, WR, Bills. The wideout spot opposite Lee Evans is up for grabs in Buffalo, and Parrish put his best foot forward with 104 receiving yards and a touchdown against the Jets. However, 51 of his yards came on one of four receptions. We like Parrish's chances of winning the job over Josh Reed and Peerless Price, both of whom lack Parrish's big-play ability, but Parrish must show more consistency before fantasy owners can trust him with a regular lineup spot. **Ruling:** Fluke. *—George Winkler*

BLOG ALERT


ALBERT DICKSON / SN

"If anyone feels the pain of Terrell Owens' broken finger, it's me. I own Owens in all my leagues."

Dance on Vinnie Iyer's star at sportingnews.com.

Spotlight matchup

WEEK 4: Chargers at Ravens

Unless you own one of these defenses (or play in an IDP league), this game is as nightmarish as a Verne Troyer (aka Mini Me) nude scene. Both defenses have been brilliant, and the Chargers' Shawne Merriman has a chance to wrestle away the title of most dominating linebacker from the Ravens' Ray Lewis. Aside from starting LaDainian Tomlinson, Antonio Gates or Todd Heap, you should avoid this matchup like a plate of fresh spinach. *—Chris Bahr*

SCOTT AUDETTE / AP

Lewis

Stuck in reverse

Cadillac Williams burst onto the NFL scene last season with three consecutive 100-yard games to start his career. Back spasms and poor offensive line play kept Williams from repeating that performance in this season's first three games.

	'05	'06
Carries	88	42
Yards	434	107
TDs	2	1

BOB LEVERONE / SN

You Could WIN Your Own

PIGSKIN PALACE

If you win, we'll turn a room in your house into a football shrine complete with a custom bar, home theater with a 50" plasma HDTV, a $2,000 gift certificate and more!

Enter for your chance to win at www.jimbeam.com/football

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. Must be a U.S. resident and 21 years of age or older to participate. Void where prohibited. Subject to complete official rules available at www.jimbeam.com/pigskin. Sweepstakes ends 11/15/2006.
Jim Beam® Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, 40% Alc./Vol. ©2006 James B. Beam Distilling Co., Clermont, KY.

THE STUFF INSIDE MATTERS MOST.

AFC EAST

FANTASY*spin* Don't give up on Dolphins QB Daunte Culpepper yet, but if he doesn't produce this week against the Texans, it will be time to consider a backup plan.

BUFFALO BILLS

C **Melvin Fowler** is a good fit on a line that emphasizes quickness and athleticism. He has good footwork and the lateral mobility to pull and trap effectively. Fowler (6-3, 295) is intelligent and technically sound but lacks bulk and can be overpowered by bull rushers. **NEW ROLE:** WR **Lee Evans** is adjusting to his new role as the No. 1 wideout. Opponents fear his deep speed and are rolling a safety to his side, but Evans is starting to make plays underneath the coverage. He runs good routes and catches everything thrown his way. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** CB **Nate Clements** has an interesting way of improving his technique. He puts a large band around his legs and stands in front of a teammate who has pads on his hands. Clements moves forward and backward and throws punches at the pads like a boxer. The band helps his footwork and balance because he must take shorter steps. The punches are good practice for jamming receivers. *—Allen Wilson*

MIAMI DOLPHINS

DT **Keith Traylor** is the anchor of one of the team's strongest and most consistent units. He's adept at stuffing the run and pressuring the quarterback. Traylor, 37, gets occasional breathers from backups **Dan Wilkinson** and **Jeff Zgonina**. That helps him maintain energy and quickness throughout the game. **NEW ROLE:** To compensate for a lack of big plays in the passing game, the team is calling more reverses for WRs **Chris Chambers** and **Marty Booker**. Defenses eventually will key on the slow-developing runs and limit Chambers' and Booker's gains. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** CB **Travis Daniels** worked on improving his hands while he was rehabbing an ankle sprain. He stayed after practice to catch balls thrown by the JUGS machine, which wide receivers use to get extra reps. Daniels' reward was a fourth quarter interception that sealed last week's victory over the Titans. *—Jeff Darlington*

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

LE **Ty Warren** is often forgotten behind fellow DL **Richard Seymour** and **Vince Wilfork**, but Warren has come into his own. He's solid at the point of attack and plays with leverage and a nonstop motor. He's particularly strong out of the team's new 4-3 set, where he's allowed to fire upfield instead of being forced to react in the two-gap scheme the Patriots used in the 3-4. **IN THE RED ZONE:** LT **Matt Light** once was criticized for lacking strength and power but has established himself as one of the best run blockers in the league. His emergence means the team can run the ball more often in the red zone rather than using play-action. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** TE **Ben Watson** hasn't had a breakthrough game because the Pats don't have a wideout who commands double coverage. Opponents have been pounding Watson at the line and sending multiple defenders at him. *—John Tomase*

CJ GUNTHER FOR SN

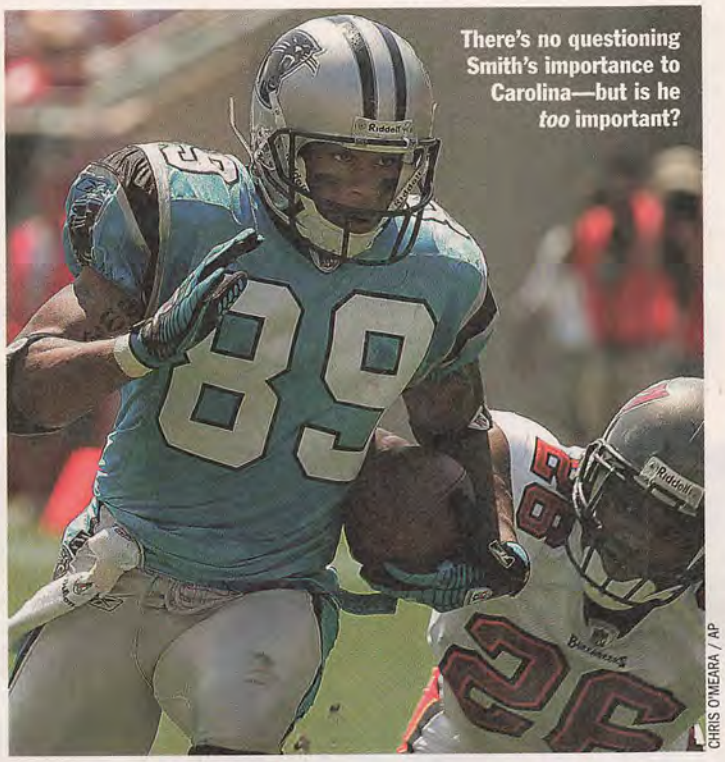
NEW YORK JETS

RB **Derrick Blaylock** started the first two games but wasn't active in Week 3. That shows how unsettled the team is at running back. Rookie **Leon Washington** deserves a long look. He's only 5-8, 202 but has excellent burst and change-of-direction skills. No other Jets running back has his big-play ability. **HOT:** **Jerricho Cotchery** (6-0, 207) is a strong wideout with excellent hands and balance. He knows how to shield defenders with his body but doesn't have great speed. Still, he worked hard in the offseason to reduce his 40 time and likes to throw around his body as a blocker. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The Jets practice with loud music blaring from sideline speakers. Rock, hip-hop, country—you name it—everything gets a trial run. Coach **Eric Mangini** plays the music because it prepares the team for crowd noise and forces players to use nonverbal communication such as hand signals. *—Rich Cimini*

SCOUTS VIEWS

Observations and opinions from two NFL scouts, one from each conference.

T.J. Houshmandzadeh's return has helped open up opportunities for other Bengals players. And with **Carson Palmer** distributing the ball to everyone, it's a plus for their offense all the way around. … Right now, **Terry Glenn** is more valuable to Dallas than **Terrell Owens**. Glenn and **Drew Bledsoe** have a history together going back to their New England days. Drew is comfortable with Terry; he knows where he's going to be and how he's going to get open. Once T.O. plays more games, he'll definitely be more valuable. … The Chiefs are in an adjustment mode. They have new coaches with a new philosophy, they've had some transition on the offensive line, and they lost their quarterback. They're trying to work through all those things. … Obviously, Carolina is much better with **Steve Smith**, but it's scary when one player matters that much to a team. I think the Panthers are in the middle of shuffling a lot of things around. Injuries to their offensive line and a lack of continuity have been causing their problems. … Records can be deceiving this early in the season. Some of the unbeaten teams have a long way to go in that they haven't really played the tougher teams. For example, the Chargers have played Oakland and Tennessee, two teams that are struggling. It's hard to gauge how good you are when you play teams like that. … I don't see as many good, quality wide receivers as I did a couple years ago. I'm not sure why. Maybe part of it is because quarterbacks on new teams just haven't been able to hook up with the wide receivers. … The Raiders need to do something to jump-start their offense. Both **Andrew Walter** and **Aaron Brooks** have struggled, but Walter is a young guy who can grow in the offense and Brooks might not be there in the future. If they're going to struggle and have a bad season, they might as well put Walter in there and let him go through the growing pains.


There's no questioning Smith's importance to Carolina—but is he *too* important?

CHRIS O'MEARA / AP

FS Ben Watson, Patriots ▸ Randy McMichael, Dolphins ***K:*** David Akers, Eagles ▸ Jeff Wilkins, Rams ***D-ST:*** Jaguars ▸ Falcons ▸ Seahawks **WEEK 4 SLEEPERS**

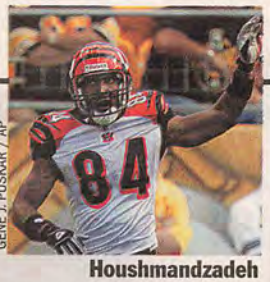
Fantasy Source Football, your online fantasy authority: fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl.

AFC NORTH

BALTIMORE RAVENS

OLB **Bart Scott** has become a force as both a run stopper and pass rusher. He has good strength and decent speed, times his blitzes well and doesn't mind giving up his body to take on lead blockers while MLB **Ray Lewis** makes tackles. **NEW ROLE:** RB **Musa Smith** appears to have replaced **Mike Anderson** as **Jamal Lewis'** backup. Smith performed well in all four preseason games and showed more explosiveness and cutting ability than Lewis and Anderson. Smith could take away some of Lewis' carries, especially after halftime. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The team blitzes from almost anywhere, usually with Lewis or Scott. For a different look, Lewis and Scott sometimes both blitz from one side or from the middle. The Ravens blitzed a lot against the Bucs, Raiders and Browns in the first three games because those teams have young quarterbacks and weak offensive lines. *—Mike Preston*

CINCINNATI BENGALS


GENE J. PUSKAR / AP

Houshmandzadeh

One of QB **Carson Palmer**'s biggest weaknesses is ball security in the pocket. He's a resilient player who shows toughness and poise, but he often loses the ball when he gets sacked because he holds it too loosely. **RISING:** WR **T.J. Houshmandzadeh**'s presence gives the club a major boost. He is a smooth, savvy and precise route runner who has a knack for finding openings in the secondary. He's difficult to single cover because he makes sharp cuts and has great hands. Houshmandzadeh piles up yards after the catch because of his toughness. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The club's ability to generate turnovers is no accident. The defense begins each practice with a fast-paced turnover drill. The linebackers and defensive backs form a circle and take turns picking off passes tipped by the linemen. It's a competitive drill that requires concentration and improves hand-eye coordination. *—Chick Ludwig*

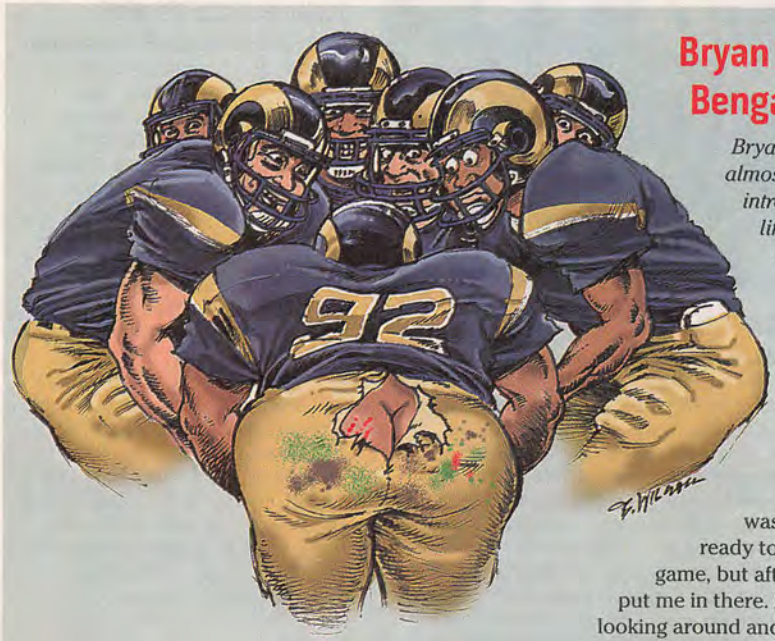
CLEVELAND BROWNS

CB **Daylon McCutcheon**'s season-ending knee injury blows a hole into an already thin secondary. **Daven Holly** started last Sunday and finished with seven tackles. He is a good athlete and a feisty player, but his technique and recognition skills need work. **Ralph Brown** also moved up the depth chart. Brown has had trouble in coverage in the red zone. **SLEEPER:** RB **Jason Wright**, who got most of the carries against the Ravens because of a shoulder injury to **Reuben Droughns**, will be important if Droughns wears down as the feature back. Wright is smart and elusive but lacks breakaway speed. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** WR **Braylon Edwards**' ability to run past cornerbacks effortlessly is a result of his track background. He and his father, a former NFL running back and Braylon's running coach, have worked on accelerating and striding with optimal efficiency. **Stan Edwards** also taught Braylon how to translate track speed into NFL speed. *—Steve Doerschuk*

PITTSBURGH STEELERS

The off-week comes at a good time for SS **Troy Polamalu**, who has been playing with an injured right shoulder that affects his ability to make tackles. He hasn't been used in many blitz situations, which hurts the defense because it relies on his versatility. **RISING:** The team wants to get WR **Cedrick Wilson** more involved in the offense. He runs solid routes and comes out of his breaks well, and his deep speed makes him a good fit for the team's split end position. He eventually will be the replacement for departed WR **Antwaan Randle El** on trick plays. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The Steelers use a lot of zone blitzes and rely on their corners to keep receivers in front of them and not give up the deep pass, which is why the team has been keeping CBs **Ike Taylor** and **Deshea Townsend** out of bump-and-run coverage. The team's system gives the cornerbacks better vision and allows them to cover other areas and pick up other receivers. *—Gerry Dulac*

FANTASY*spin* Browns QB Charlie Frye and WR Braylon Edwards continue to show chemistry, especially on deep balls. Edwards is a good weekly play as a third wideout.



Bryan Robinson, Bengals LE

Bryan bares all—well, almost—about the rude introduction he was given to life in the NFL in his second game as a pro.

My rookie year, there was a fullback by the name of William Floyd (for the 49ers). I was with the Rams at the time, and I had made the team as an undrafted free agent. I was really hyped up and ready to go. I didn't start the game, but after a couple plays, they put me in there. I had no sense of looking around and watching for guys trying to crack back on you. So I'm running to the ball and William Floyd hit me so hard, I did a somersault. I flipped over and all I remember was everybody yelling, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, welcome to the NFL, rook." When I got back in my stance, there was a breeze on my butt cheeks. I'm like, "What the hell?" He hit me so hard that I had ripped my pants, and I've got this big hole in the back of my pants, and I'm bleeding and everybody's laughing at me because my ass is hanging out. It was so embarrassing. I swear to this day, I always tell myself, "I am going to get him back." Unfortunately for me, Floyd retired. Fortunately for *him*, he retired.

BLOG ALERT

"The Simms signature is heart, and Chris has shown the ability to bounce back from difficult stretches."

Vinnie Iyer thinks Simms' moxie will serve him well as he recovers from a splenectomy. Share your thoughts at sportingnews.com.

JEFF SINER / THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER / AP

Give Simms credit: He suffered a ruptured spleen but finished the game before having it removed.

QB: Byron Leftwich, Jaguars > Jake Delhomme, Panthers > Chad Pennington, Jets **RB:** Julius Jones, Cowboys > Kevin Jones, Lions > Ron Dayne, Texans **WR:** Jerricho Cotchery, Jets >

BRIAN BALDINGER

You're in for a real jolt when you try to defend Westbrook

It was a stiff-arm that would have made Jim Brown proud. Or Joe Frazier. And it was delivered by Eagles running back Brian Westbrook, at 5-8 and 203 pounds one of the littlest guys on the field.

Westbrook already had run about 35 yards when he met 49ers safety Mike Adams at the San Francisco 35. Most running backs go down at that point, but Westbrook unleashed one of the most violent stiff-arms I've seen. It was nasty, a jolt to the face, and Westbrook just kept on going for a 71-yard touchdown.

If there's a tougher player in the league to defend, I don't know who it is.

Westbrook scored three touchdowns against the 49ers on Sunday: two on runs, one on a shovel pass. He gained 117 yards on the ground, 47 on receptions. Andy Reid moved him all over the place, and the 49ers had no solution for him. Whatever Westbrook wanted to do, he did.

I love watching Westbrook on screen passes. He approaches a screen as he does a running play, looking for the hole to hit in the defensive line. Defenders would love to chip him as he comes out of the backfield, but he is great at finding a gap and getting through the first wave of defenders clean. Then he gets to a spot where there isn't much traffic and he turns quickly and catches the pass.

ROBERT SEALE / SN (2)

When a little back with speed and moves can swat away safeties, too, it almost seems unfair.

Once the ball is in his hands, look out. He's fast, but his most dangerous weapon is his ability to stop cold in his tracks, then start moving again as though he had never stopped. The defender's reaction is to stop with him, but Westbrook is so quick and fluid that he's gone before the defender can try to catch him. That freeze-frame ability to stop and start reminds me of Tony Dorsett and Barry Sanders. Yeah, Westbrook is that good.

It's funny. There was a lot of talk in the offseason about Philadelphia's offense without Terrell Owens. Fact is, Owens' absence has allowed Donovan McNabb to spread the ball around, which makes the Eagles a much more difficult team to defend. They're doing just fine without him. But if Westbrook had left, well, that would have been a different story. He attacks and punishes defenses in so many different ways. Just ask Mike Adams.

Brian Baldinger, an offensive lineman for 12 NFL seasons, can be heard on Sporting News Radio and seen on FOX Sports. Listen online at radio.sportingnews.com.

AFC SOUTH

HOUSTON TEXANS

Rookie RE **Mario Williams** still has no sacks and, more important, is getting handled by one blocker, often a tight end. Williams' athleticism is not in question, but his effort is. ... **Ron Dayne** has emerged as the team's starting running back. The Texans like his size (5-10, 245) and ability to move the pile. He replaced **Wali Lundy**, who has struggled with blitz pickups and hanging onto the ball. **HOT:** WR **Andre Johnson** is off to a strong start and is taking advantage of the increased single coverage he is facing. He has great hands and catches almost everything thrown his way. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The Texans used more of their cover 2 scheme last Sunday after giving up long pass plays the first two weeks. They still gave up big plays against the Redskins, but they weren't deep passes. Receivers caught several short passes and ran past Texans defenders for long gains. *—Megan Manfull*

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

CB **Jason David** (5-8, 180), one of the league's smaller corners, makes up for his lack of size with an aggressive approach. He added a few pounds of muscle in the offseason, which helps him be more physical in coverage and run support. **INJURY UPDATE:** DT **Corey Simon**'s recovery from August knee surgery hit a snag, and he likely will miss at least the next two games. The team's undersized defense is better equipped to stop the run with Simon (6-2, 300). Without him, the Colts have allowed rushing averages of 161.7 yards per game and 5.3 yards per attempt. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The club continues to use players other than true fullbacks as lead blockers in short-yardage situations, and success in those situations has been spotty. Former Colts RB **Edgerrin James** was a solid short-yardage runner, but it remains to be seen whether RBs **Dominic Rhodes** and **Joseph Addai** can be as effective. *—Mike Chappell*

Williams

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS

RB **Maurice Jones-Drew** is flashing the playmaking ability the team coveted when it drafted him in the second round. He averaged 27.5 yards per kickoff return against the Colts and added four rushes of at least 10 yards. Jones has a low center of gravity and excellent power, speed and shiftiness. **RISING:** WR **Reggie Williams**' hard work in the offseason—club officials say he spent more time at the team's facility than any player—is paying off. The Jaguars like to hit him on quick throws near the line and let him navigate for yards. He shows a knack for making the first defender miss and the strength to break tackles. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** RB **Fred Taylor** and Jones-Drew are making an effort to find cutback lanes, which gives them an advantage against overpursuing linebackers. The runs don't always go to the backside. Sometimes the back dips inside, which draws defenders in, before getting to the edge. As defenders give chase, they are tangled up in traffic. *—Michael C. Wright*

TENNESSEE TITANS

The Titans have switched CB **Pacman Jones** to the left side in an effort to get Jones, their best defensive playmaker, more involved in the game. He had not had many opportunities on the right side. **Reynaldo Hill** has moved to the right side. **COLD:** TE **Ben Troupe** has gotten off to a slow start this season, in large part because of poor quarterback play. Troupe needs to become a better outlet for QB **Kerry Collins**. Troupe is athletic enough to create matchup problems, and the team is hoping he'll turn more short catches into long gains. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** DE **Kyle Vanden Bosch** has had a positive impact on the offense. In practice, he jabs at the football on just about every running play, sometimes as far as 30 yards downfield. Some backs have learned the hard way to protect the ball—after fumbling and drawing the ire of the coaching staff. Backs are starting to get used to Vanden Bosch's tactics now, and that likely will help during games. *—Jim Wyatt*

FANTASY*spin*

Titans QB Kerry Collins finally has his first TD pass of the season, but he's still missing on too many chances. Vince Young is looming.

FS Bernard Berrian, Bears ▸ Braylon Edwards, Browns ▸ Keyshawn Johnson, Panthers **TE:** Dallas Clark, Colts ▸ Owen Daniels, Texans **K:** Sebastian Janikowski, Raiders ▸

Fantasy Source Football, your online fantasy authority: fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl.

AFC WEST

FANTASY*spin* The Raiders' offense will perform better, but it will be because Oakland's opponents in Weeks 4 and 5 are the Browns and 49ers.

DENVER BRONCOS

DT **Michael Myers** excels at anchoring against the run because he plays with good leverage and uses his hands to shed blocks. He is adept at getting under the pads of blockers and holding his ground at the point of attack. Myers does a good job sniffing out gadget plays and screens. **RISING:** WR **Javon Walker** will know he's completely trusted as a playmaker when he's targeted for throws outside of the play called in the huddle. Adjusting for an underthrown ball in Week 2 was a step in the right direction, as were his two touchdown receptions against the Patriots. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** QB **Jake Plummer** is at his best when the Broncos' running game is effective. Defenses then have to respect the run, which allows Plummer to execute play-action rollouts. He struggles with accuracy in the pocket because he sometimes has difficulty reading the entire field, but rolling outside cuts the field in half. *—Lee Rasizer*

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

The defense is improved, but the Chiefs still need help at several positions. They are desperate for a defensive tackle who can hold up against the run and collapse the pocket. WLB **Kendrell Bell** has been a disappointment, and the team needs a young cornerback who's good in coverage and can make tackles. **NEW APPROACH:** Pass protection issues have forced the Chiefs to rely on running plays and short passes more than they would like. They have found they can't let their quarterbacks take deep drops and look down the field without putting them at risk. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** Opponents are double-teaming LE **Tamba Hali** in passing situations, a rare sign of respect for a rookie. The Chiefs showcased Hali during the preseason as a standup rusher in the middle of the line, a role in which he was effective. Look for the team to use the tactic against some opponents. *—Adam Teicher*

OAKLAND RAIDERS

Rookie RG **Paul McQuistan** didn't perform well in his first two starts, so fellow rookie **Kevin Boothe** is expected to replace him. Boothe (6-5, 312) has decent size and excels at pulling on running plays. He also is bright and learns quickly. **COLD:** RB **LaMont Jordan** is off to a slow start, partly because the holes haven't been there. The team also has fallen behind quickly, so he hasn't gotten enough carries to get into a rhythm. Don't be surprised if he bounces back Sunday against the Browns; in 2005, he ran for 132 yards against them. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The Raiders have gone to great lengths to reduce turnovers and create more on defense. In one drill, a coach throws the ball on the ground and an offensive lineman is assigned to recover it. In another, one defender tips a pass into the air and another player tries to catch it. *—Steve Corkran*

Jordan

BOB LEVERONE / SN

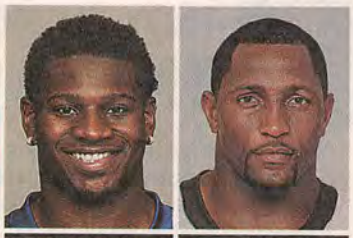
SAN DIEGO CHARGERS

OLB **Shaun Phillips** has been almost as crucial to the defense's success as OLB **Shawne Merriman**. Phillips' ability to pressure quarterbacks is impressive, but he also gets after ballcarriers—an important strength as he replaces **Steve Foley**. Phillips has great anticipation skills, but he has jumped offside three times in two games. **SPOTLIGHT MATCHUP:** TE **Antonio Gates** may face his biggest challenge yet when he goes against Ravens SS **Ed Reed**, a ballhawk. Gates has fared well against some of the league's top safeties in the past but has dropped a few passes already this season. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** QB **Philip Rivers**, who threw 46 passes without an interception in the first two games, works hard on being accurate. Phillips is a perfectionist in practice, where even the slightest hint of inaccuracy gets to him. He quickly figures out what he did wrong and how he can correct it. *—Kevin Acee*

Courtyard by Marriott *presents*

WEEK 4 PERFORMANCE EDGE

By War Room scouts



LaDainian Tomlinson *RB, Chargers* VS. **Ray Lewis** *MLB, Ravens*

To avoid Baltimore's stout interior, the Chargers will attack the perimeter early with Tomlinson as a receiver—and his elusiveness in space will challenge Lewis. But the Ravens' line will free Lewis to pursue Tomlinson to the edge on running plays, and there will be defenders waiting if L.T. tries to cut back. **Advantage: Lewis.**

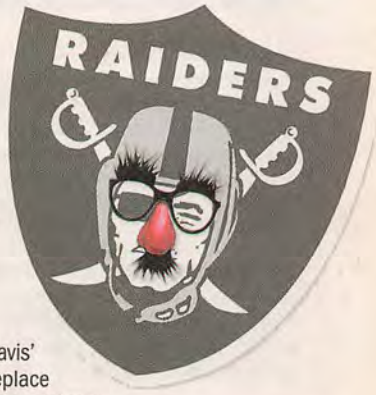
Redskins RG Randy Thomas vs. Jaguars DT John Henderson. If Thomas can get into Henderson's body, he will be strong enough to absorb Henderson's rush. Because the Jaguars have another dominant tackle in Marcus Stroud, Thomas will have to face Henderson one-on-one fairly often—and Henderson will wear him down. **Advantage: Henderson.**

Bears WR Muhsin Muhammad vs. Seahawks CB Marcus Trufant. Muhammad will break across the middle on short and intermediate routes, and he rarely loses battles for contested balls. Trufant (5-11, 199) has decent size and is strong, and he will try to redirect Muhammad outside, where Trufant can use his speed advantage. But Muhammad (6-2, 217) is too big and powerful to be knocked off routes. **Advantage: Muhammad.**

More matchups: sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom.

Redesigned by business travelers for business travelers.℠ COURTYARD Marriott

Plumbing the depths of the Black Hole



Just imagine comics on the West Coast using the Raiders as a punch line.

Comic: The Raiders are bad.
Crowd: How bad are they?
Comic: They're so bad ...

■ ... their QB situation is like being Al Davis' tailor—hopeless. Aaron Brooks, signed to replace Kerry Collins, has a woeful 58.0 passer rating and may miss a few weeks with a shoulder injury. Replacement Andrew Walter has a 19.0 rating. A QB rating shouldn't be higher than a poor ACT score.

■ ... they have one takeaway—and seven giveaways. That turnover margin is about as pretty as Warren Sapp's waistline. And though the defense isn't terrible, its trash-talk always is trumped when opponents break out the "Scoreboard" line.

■ ... the offensive line has given up 15 sacks in two games. And when it comes to scoring, the Raiders must feel like the really drunk guy at a kegger—there's a lot of action, but they're not getting any of it. A 55-6 scoring differential means opponents are having all the fun.

■ ... their odds of winning the Super Bowl are 300:1. Playing the lottery is smarter than betting on this long shot—and that's not a joke. *—Zach Bodendieck*

WEEK 4 STUMBLERS ***D-ST:*** Phil Dawson, Browns ▸ Dolphins ▸ Chiefs ***QB:*** David Carr, Texans ▸ Alex Smith, 49ers ▸ Philip Rivers, Chargers ***RB:*** Edgerrin James, Cardinals ▸

TROY AIKMAN

There's no die in Eli

Some days, a quarterback just knows he's in for a battle. The defense he's facing will be blanketing his receivers, rushing him from all directions and taking plenty of shots. Often, he'll be doing well just to ditch the ball rather than take another sack.

That was the type of day Eli Manning was having against Philadelphia in Week 2. For three quarters, the Eagles were all over him, sacking him six times and limiting him to 138 yards and one touchdown. The Giants were losing, 24-7, and you just knew Manning would get blasted in the papers the next day for his poor performance.

The thing is, he wasn't playing poorly. Though the Eagles were beating him up pretty badly—a situation where it's easy to make a big mistake—Manning hadn't thrown an interception. He was making smart decisions with the ball. He wasn't forcing throws, he was avoiding some hits, and he was getting rid of the ball when he could. He actually was playing pretty well.

Fortunately for Manning, the fourth quarter and overtime went much better. He started getting more help from his teammates and played phenomenally while leading the Giants to an improbable 30-24 overtime victory. His final numbers (31-of-43 for 371 yards and three touchdowns) were great, but they still didn't do justice to the terrific game he played.

GEORGE WIDMAN / AP

Numbers may lie, but Manning's ability to come through in crunch time is telling.

Stats can be so misleading. A quarterback could be 14-of-30 for 125 yards and two interceptions, but that might actually be pretty good depending on what the defense and his teammates did. Were his errant throws the result of a fierce pass rush that didn't allow him to get set in the pocket? Did he have to throw the ball away to avoid sacks? Did his receivers drop the ball or run bad routes? It's not as simple as looking at numbers.

The Giants fell behind again last week in Seattle. After a horrific first quarter in which two of his passes were intercepted, putting the Giants in a big hole, Manning rebounded to go 22-of-29 for 276 yards the rest of the way. He again was tremendous in the fourth quarter and threw three touchdown passes as the Giants made a furious comeback attempt. They fell short, but Manning again showed his ability to rise to the occasion.

With the game on the line, you just can't count out Manning. That's a great quality to have.

The Troy Aikman Show is broadcast at 7 p.m. ET every Thursday through the Super Bowl on Sporting News Radio. Listen online at radio.sportingnews.com.

NFC EAST

DALLAS COWBOYS

C **Andre Gurode** excels at drive blocking, especially against 3-4 nose tackles. He has a powerful lower body and does a good job of keeping his pad level low but doesn't always use sound technique. He also lacks the quickness of backup **Al Johnson**; Gurode struggles to get to linebackers and defensive backs on the perimeter. **GOOD MATCHUP:** Because the Titans' run defense has been soft, the Cowboys will establish the run early on Sunday. That means RB **Julius Jones** will get plenty of carries. Jones has done a good job of picking up yards after contact. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** Against the Titans, expect the Cowboys to move WR **Terry Glenn** around looking for mismatches that take advantage of his speed. If WR **Terrell Owens** (finger) plays, Glenn will line up opposite him and next to TE **Jason Witten**, which will force the safety to pick between defending Glenn and Witten. *—Jean-Jacques Taylor*

NEW YORK GIANTS

The pass rush has faltered, and the secondary has been awful. Receivers are finding gaping holes in the middle of the Giants' two-deep zone, and the defensive backs are losing position battles when they do have coverage. Free-agent CB **Sam Madison** doesn't have the burst he used to, and he has been left isolated far too often. **RISING:** WR **Amani Toomer** has thrived in the No. 2 role behind **Plaxico Burress**, with 20 receptions and three touchdowns, both team highs, in the first three games. Toomer has evolved from a dangerous outside receiver to one who can make tough catches over the middle. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The lack of interceptions by the Giants secondary the past few years is startling, and the coaches say the problem is ball awareness. The defensive backs often seem to lose sight of the ball in the air just for a second, which causes them to be a bit slow in their reaction time. *—Ralph Vacchiano*

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES

WR **Donte' Stallworth** (6-1, 196), who missed Sunday's game with a hamstring injury but is likely to play in Week 4, has excellent speed and decent size. He gives the team the deep threat it lacked and is reliable over the middle, where he makes tough catches in traffic. He sometimes loses focus and drops easy passes, which is one of the reasons he fell out of favor with the Saints. **GOOD MATCHUP:** RB **Brian Westbrook** has put up huge numbers against the Packers' defense the past two seasons, and he likely will do more of the same Monday night. Last year, he ran for 117 yards and a touchdown against Green Bay. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** Coordinator **Jim Johnson** has taken his line rotation to a new level this season. In the past, Johnson rotated three tackles and brought in a pass-rushing end on third downs. This season, he is using all eight linemen on almost an equal basis in an effort to keep the group fresh over a 16-game schedule. *—Mark Eckel*

Stallworth

RUSTY KENNEDY / AP

WASHINGTON REDSKINS

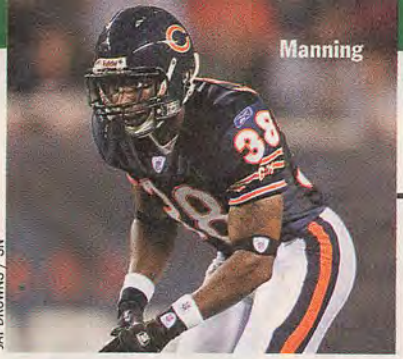
LT **Chris Samuels** is exceptionally quick and agile for a player his size (6-5, 310). He has good balance, fires off the ball well and is durable and plays hurt. But he can be pushed off the line and knocked off-balance by strong power rushers, and he is vulnerable against speed rushers. **HOT:** RB **Clinton Portis'** importance to the offense can't be overstated. Safeties have to play closer to the line when Portis is on the field, which opens up the passing game. He is a big-play threat because he has excellent vision and is adept at stepping around tacklers to gain additional yards. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** Every week during the individual sessions of practice, the quarterbacks gather near midfield and throw passes to receivers. Before each pass, the football is submerged in a bucket of water and then handed to a quarterback. No matter what the weather forecast for the weekend, the quarterbacks have at least one session per week of throwing soaked footballs. *—Paul Woody*

FANTASY*spin*

Redskins RB Ladell Betts ran for 124 yards in Week 3, but there's no way a backup will put up those numbers against the Jaguars' defense.

FS Thomas Jones, Bears > Jamal Lewis, Ravens **WR:** Santana Moss, Redskins > Keenan McCardell, Chargers > Lee Evans, Bills > Troy Williamson, Vikings

Fantasy Source Football, your online fantasy authority: fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl.



JAY DROWNS / SN

NFC NORTH

CHICAGO BEARS

After FS **Chris Harris** was caught out of position several times in the opening two games, the coaches gave his starting job to **Danieal Manning**. Manning is not as stout against the run, but he has the excellent range the team wants at the position. The Bears will switch safeties in the box against the run, and he'll get help from SS **Mike Brown** on positioning. **HOT:** The Bears dropped too many passes last season, and WR **Muhsin Muhammad** was the worst offender. This season, the receivers have caught almost everything thrown by QB **Rex Grossman**. After practice, the receivers play catch. A drop means push-ups. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** RE **Alex Brown** has a good first step and is one of the league's better two-way ends. Brown has a few moves to get around left tackles, and he hustles, is intelligent and does a good job of studying his opponents. However, he is a little light (260), and opponents can take him out of plays by getting their hands on him. *—Brad Biggs*

DETROIT LIONS

Aside from CB **Dre' Bly**, the secondary lacks playmakers, and opponents are exploiting that weakness. It doesn't help that the Lions have been unable to sustain a consistent pass rush. Offenses are neutralizing the line by throwing quick passes and keeping in extra blockers. **SPOTLIGHT MATCHUP:** The Lions used to match Bly against the opponent's best receiver, but the new staff doesn't do that. Still, Bly will see plenty of Rams WR **Torry Holt** this week. Bly can't give Holt the same cushion he has been giving other receivers. One player responsible for watching Holt deep will be his brother, FS **Terrence Holt**. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** MLB **Boss Bailey** adds spark to the defense with his speed and coverage ability. Bailey isn't a big hitter, but his tackling and recognition skills—especially against the running game—are improving. Look for him to make several interceptions this season. *—Tom Kowalski*

GREEN BAY PACKERS

The secondary is a mess. SS **Marquand Manuel** and FS **Nick Collins** are making the most mistakes among the defensive backs and giving up way too many big plays. Manuel looks slow and can't handle man coverage. Collins has Pro Bowl potential but has big lapses in coverage. **RISING:** Rookie WR **Greg Jennings** is the real deal. He can turn a short pass into a long gain. He's such a good route runner and so aware of defenders that he's able to make quick pivots in the open field. He needs to get stronger so he can excel on slant routes. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The offensive line is struggling with cut blocks, which are essential to the team's zone-blocking system. The linemen go through a drill every day in which coaches hold blocking pads on the ground and force the linemen to dive into them as they go through their normal motions. *—Tom Silverstein*

MINNESOTA VIKINGS

DTs **Pat Williams** and **Kevin Williams** are an impressive duo. Pat Williams is dominating centers, which causes opponents to double-team him. When that happens, Kevin Williams, who lost a significant amount of weight in the offseason, is making plays that last year he was too slow and heavy to make. **COMMITTEE APPROACH:** TE **Jermaine Wiggins**, the team's leader in receptions last year, is splitting time with **Jim Kleinsasser** in the Vikings' varied formations. When he does play, Wiggins is getting more attention from defenses, which is affecting his production. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The addition of a second goalpost at the team's practice field has allowed videographers to capture all aspects of field goals and extra points—the protection, snap, hold and kick—from a second angle. The team hopes the addition will help correct previously unseen problems in the kicking game. *—Kevin Seifert*

FANTASY*spin* Packers WR Greg Jennings is in a perfect situation to succeed. He's teamed with a veteran quarterback, and Donald Driver draws every opponent's best corner.

NFC SOUTH

ATLANTA FALCONS

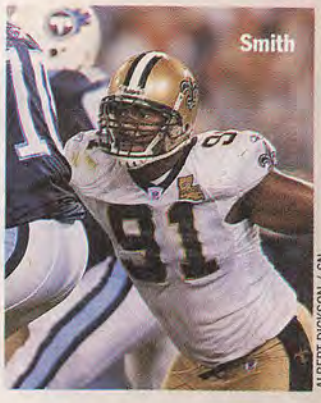
The team's interior linemen—LG **Matt Lehr**, C **Todd McClure** and RG **Kynan Forney**—are undersized, which compromises protection and gives blitzers easier access to QB **Michael Vick**. As a result, the coaching staff is using integrated option runs to keep Vick in motion and force defenders to spread out. **COLD:** WR **Ashley Lelie** has the skills to stretch defenses, but he had just four catches in the first two games. The Falcons emphasize running the ball, so their receivers will be underworked as long as the running game is successful. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** As part of its renewed emphasis on stopping the run, the team wants to improve the push up front so opposing backs are forced to run laterally. That allows speedy LBs **Keith Brooking**, **Michael Boley** and **Demorrio Williams** to get to runners before they turn the corner. The addition of NT **Grady Jackson**, who is tough to knock backward, has been key. *—George Henry*

CAROLINA PANTHERS

DT **Kris Jenkins** is close to becoming a dominant run defender again after missing most of the past two seasons with injuries. His size (6-4, 335) allows him to clog the middle, and he also is valuable as a pass rusher. The club wants him on the field on passing downs and gradually is increasing his snap count. **COLD:** The team is using more three-receiver sets, but it's not getting much production beyond starters **Steve Smith** and **Keyshawn Johnson**. **Keary Colbert** can't get separation from corners. **Drew Carter** has been more effective but has dropped passes. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The team had hoped to get the tight ends more involved in the passing game this season, but struggles on the line have forced it to keep the tight ends in as blockers on passing downs. TEs **Mike Seidman**, **Kris Mangum** and **Michael Gaines** have ability as receivers, but they probably won't get to showcase those abilities this season. *—Pat Yasinskas*

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

LE **Will Smith** is powerful and fast. He is an excellent pass rusher but also a capable run stopper. Offensive linemen who face him in practice say he has great leverage and hands and compare him to Colts E **Dwight Freeney**. **RISING:** RB **Deuce McAllister** has come back strong from the torn ACL that ended his season last October. He still can gain tough yards and has shown the ability to kick into high gear once he finds a hole. The addition of RB **Reggie Bush** has not had a negative effect on McAllister. Bush often lines up as a receiver, which keeps defenses off-balance. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The Saints are trying to win the endurance battle. Players say they are in great condition after a grueling camp, and coach **Sean Payton** is keeping them fresh. He has been freely rotating his defensive players—especially at cornerback, end, tackle and middle linebacker. Players say it is making a big difference late in games. *—Mike Triplett*



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS

QB **Chris Simms** (ruptured spleen) is out indefinitely, so rookie **Bruce Gradkowski** likely will become the starter. In the preseason, Gradkowski showed a surprising ability to move the team. He displayed good poise in the pocket, an accurate arm and great mobility. **Jay Fiedler**, who was released because of shoulder problems, could return. **COLD:** The team hasn't made enough of a commitment to feeding RB **Cadillac Williams**. He is averaging 14.0 carries per game after averaging 20.7 last year. He needs 10 or 12 rushes in the first half to find a groove, but the team has been falling behind and dumping the run. With Simms out, the coaches must get Williams and the line in rhythm. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** **Greg Spires** is a serviceable end, but he's not a difference-maker. His best attribute is his work ethic; teammates call him Crane Operator for his blue-collar approach. Spires has excellent instincts, but he's not built well enough to be superb in any one area of the game. *—Roy Cummings*

FANTASY*spin*
WR Michael Clayton doesn't belong on most fantasy rosters. The Bucs have a limited passing game, and WR Joey Galloway gets most of the looks.

TE: Ben Troupe, Titans > Marcus Pollard, Lions ***K:*** Josh Brown, Seahawks > Matt Stover, Ravens ***D-ST:*** Bears > Patriots > Packers

PRESENTED BY DODGE GRAB LIFE BY THE HORNS

NFC WEST

ARIZONA CARDINALS

Robert Griffith struggled last year after his move from strong safety to free safety, but the hope is he'll be improved with added experience. He still runs well enough to make plays, but he has a tendency to miss tackles. Griffith is smart, and he does a nice job providing leadership in the secondary. **ON THE BLOCK:** When WR **Anquan Boldin** isn't breaking loose for a long gain, he likes to spring others for big plays. He plays with an offensive lineman's mentality, and there are few things he likes better than throwing a block for another player. Boldin doesn't want to just get in a defender's way; he wants to knock him off his feet. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The Cardinals prefer smaller, faster defensive players, and they place a premium on guys who can run to the football. Coordinator **Clancy Pendergast** promotes those attributes in meetings and on the field. As part of the defense's routine every day, a ballboy or an equipment guy will play running back and sprint downfield with the ball. The whole defense is required to run after him and surround him. It has become as much of the defense's practice routine as stretching. *—Kent Somers*

Griffith
MICHAEL McNAMARA / SN

ST. LOUIS RAMS

RE **Anthony Hargrove** didn't show up for two practices last week, and it could cost him his job. Rookie **Victor Adeyanju** played well against Arizona in his first start. Adeyanju doesn't have Hargrove's quickness, but he is relentless and holds up well against the run. **RISING:** Reverting to the team's old language helped the passing game last week. Coach **Scott Linehan**'s play-calling system had caused confusion and miscommunication between QB **Marc Bulger** and his wideouts. Just a split-second of thinking through the play call and the route had disrupted their rhythm. The changes resulted in a crisper attack and Bulger's first 300-yard game of 2006. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** DT **La'Roi Glover** isn't as explosive as he once was, but he still manages to get penetration on a fairly consistent basis, which has helped **Leonard Little** and the other ends with the pass rush. Glover, 32, also has held up well against the run, though he probably is playing too many snaps. *—Jim Thomas*

FANTASY*spin*

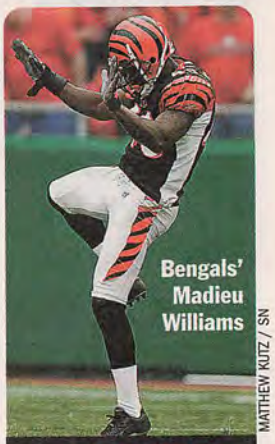
After throwing five touchdown passes in Week 3, Seattle's Matt Hasselbeck faces Chicago next week—and the Bears have not allowed a passing TD this season.

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

Eric Johnson will replace starting TE **Vernon Davis** (broken leg), who is out for a month. Johnson, 27, doesn't have Davis' extraordinary speed or game-breaking potential, but he's a reliable downfield receiving option and has a good feel for finding holes in zone coverage. His durability will be a concern. **ROOKIE REPORT:** RB **Michael Robinson** is quick and elusive but also runs with power, especially in short-yardage situations. He had two 1-yard touchdown runs in the loss to the Eagles and is developing into a capable backup to RB **Frank Gore**. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The team opened with a 3-4 defense for the first time, and OLB **Brandon Moore** started instead of DE **Melvin Oliver**. Moore has performed well as a situational pass rusher. He will team with OLB **Manny Lawson** to provide speed off the edge and help to contain mobile quarterbacks. The 49ers started training camp with a 3-4 base defense, but injuries to Moore and OLB **Parys Haralson** waylaid the plan. *—Dennis Georgatos*

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

The team's revamped nickel defense is creating problems for opponents, thanks in part to new OLB **Julian Peterson**. He creates mismatches by strolling along the line before the snap and then selecting a rush lane once the offensive linemen are set. **SPOTLIGHT MATCHUP:** The battle between RB **Shaun Alexander** and Bears MLB **Brian Urlacher** will feature perhaps the best offensive player against the best defensive player in the NFC. Alexander, who has been playing on a sore left foot since the opener, is off to a slow start. Urlacher continues to refine the way he plays his position. One of Alexander's strengths is his vision. One of Urlacher's strengths is the way he smothers—and punishes—ballcarriers. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** Opposing kickers struggle at Qwest Field, at least partly because of the heavy air. Seahawks K **Josh Brown** compares it to "kicking through gravy." The dense, moist air that engulfs the stadium is always a topic when the kickers and punters get together before games. *—Clare Farnsworth*


Bengals' Madieu Williams
MATTHEW KUTZ / SN

POWER POLL

presented by EAS FUEL YOUR PASSION eas.com

1. Colts
2. Bengals
3. Bears
4. Seahawks
5. Ravens
6. Falcons
7. Jaguars
8. Chargers
9. Eagles
10. Broncos

SN SCOREBOARD

	AFC EAST				AFC NORTH				AFC SOUTH				AFC WEST			
	NE	NYJ	BUF	MIA	BAL	CIN	PIT	CLE	IND	JAC	HOU	TEN	SD	DEN	KC	OAK
W-L	2-1	2-1	1-2	1-2	3-0	3-0	1-2	0-3	3-0	2-1	0-3	0-3	2-0	2-1	0-2	0-2
Pct.	.667	.667	.333	.333	1.000	1.000	.333	.000	1.000	.667	.000	.000	1.000	.667	.000	.000
PF	50	68	53	36	70	85	48	45	90	47	49	33	67	36	16	6
PA	51	60	53	54	20	47	54	68	59	38	98	76	7	31	32	55
Div.	2-0	1-1	1-2	0-1	1-0	2-0	0-1	0-2	2-0	0-1	0-1	0-0	1-0	1-0	0-1	0-1
AFC	2-1	2-1	1-2	1-2	2-0	3-0	1-2	0-2	2-0	1-1	0-1	0-3	2-0	2-0	0-2	0-2
WEEK																
1	BUF	at Ten	at NE	at Pit †	at TB	at KC	MIA †	NO	at NYG	DAL	PHI	NYJ	at Oak*	at Stl	CIN	SD*
2	at NYJ	NE	at Mia	BUF	OAK	CLE	at Jac*	at Cin	HOU	PIT*	at Ind	at SD	TEN	KC	at Den	at Bal
3	DEN	at Buf	NYJ	TEN	at Cle	at Pit	CIN	BAL	JAC	at Ind	WAS	at Mia	Open	at NE	Open	Open
4	at Cin	IND	MIN	at Hou	SD	NE	Open	at Oak	at NYJ	at Was	MIA	DAL	at Bal	Open	SF	CLE
5	MIA	at Jac	at Chi	at NE	at Den*	Open	at SD	at Car	TEN	NYJ	Open	at Ind	PIT	BAL*	at Ari	at SF
6	Open	MIA	at Det	at NYJ	CAR	at TB	KC	Open	Open	Open	at Dal	at Was	at SF	OAK	at Pit	at Den
7	at Buf	DET	NE	GB	Open	CAR	at Atl	DEN	WAS	at Hou	JAC	Open	at KC	at Cle	SD	ARI
8	at Min*	at Cle	Open	Open	at NO	ATL	at Oak	NYJ	at Den	at Phi	at Ten	HOU	STL	IND	SEA	PIT
9	IND	Open	GB	at Chi	CIN	at Bal	DEN	at SD	at NE	TEN	at NYG	at Jac	CLE	at Pit	at Stl	at Sea*
10	NYJ	at NE	at Ind	KC	at Ten	SD	NO	at Atl	BUF	HOU	at Jac	BAL	at Cin	at Oak	at Mia	DEN
11	at GB	CHI	at Hou	MIN	ATL	at NO	at Cle	PIT	at Dal	NYG*	BUF	at Phi	at Den	SD	OAK	at KC
12	CHI	HOU	JAC	at Det§	PIT	at Cle	at Bal	CIN	PHI	at Buf	at NYJ	NYG	OAK	at KC§	DEN§	at SD
13	DET	at GB	SD	JAC	at Cin†	BAL†	TB	KC	at Ten	at Mia	at Oak	IND	at Buf	SEA	at Cle	HOU
14	at Mia	BUF	at NYJ	NE	at KC	OAK	CLE†	at Pit†	at Jac	IND	TEN	at Hou	DEN	at SD	BAL	at Cin
15	HOU	at Min	MIA	at Buf	CLE	at Ind*	at Car	at Bal	CIN*	at Ten	at NE	JAC	KC	at Ari	at SD	STL
16	at Jac	at Mia*	TEN	NYJ*	at Pit	at Den	BAL	TB	at Hou	NE	IND	at Buf	at Sea	CIN	at Oak‡	KC‡
17	at Ten	OAK	at Bal	at Ind	BUF	PIT	at Cin	at Hou	MIA	at KC	CLE	NE	ARI	SF	JAC	at NYJ

FEARLESS FORECAST

Indianapolis at N.Y. Jets. The game will come down to which defense rushes the passer better and which offense runs the ball better. The Colts have the explosive ends to take advantage of the Jets' young line, and Indy's backs will churn out chunks of yards. **Colts 31, Jets 19.**

San Diego at Baltimore. Strong pass rushes will hold the quarterbacks in check, so a low-scoring game likely will be decided by a big play in the running game. Expect it to come from well-rested LaDainian Tomlinson, who will help the visitors grab a cross-country victory and come out as the superior AFC title contender. **Chargers 16, Ravens 13.**

New England at Cincinnati. Both defensive front sevens have been playing tough, so each team will rely on its poised quarterback to spread the ball around for big gains in the passing game. That favors the host Bengals, who have a much deeper group of receivers and a more opportunistic secondary. **Bengals 24, Patriots 20.**

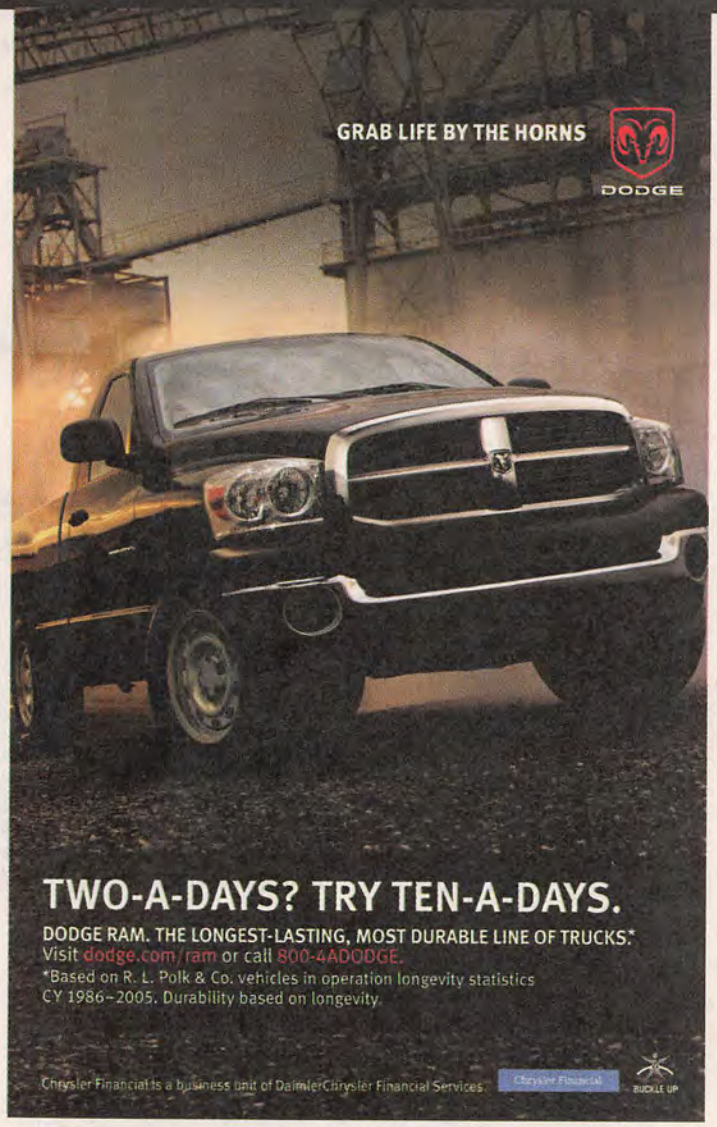
Seattle at Chicago. The Bears' defense has been stingy, but it hasn't faced an offense with Seattle's balance and playmakers. The Seahawks' underrated defense will hold a much-improved Chicago offense in check just enough. **Seahawks 17, Bears 14.** *—Vinnie Iyer*

For in-depth analysis of every game, every week, subscribe to ***Pro Football War Room*** *at* sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom.

SNumber

39.3

Disparity between Giants quarterback Eli Manning's passer rating in the first three quarters of games this season (77.4) and his rating in the fourth quarter and overtime (116.7).



SN SCOREBOARD

	NFC EAST				NFC NORTH				NFC SOUTH				NFC WEST			
	PHI	DAL	NYG	WAS	CHI	MIN	GB	DET	ATL	NO	CAR	TB	SEA	STL	ARI	SF
W-L	2-1	1-1	1-2	1-2	3-0	2-1	1-2	0-3	2-0	2-0	1-2	0-3	3-0	2-1	1-2	1-2
Pct.	.667	.500	.333	.333	1.000	.667	.333	.000	1.000	1.000	.333	.000	1.000	.667	.333	.333
PF	86	44	81	57	79	51	58	37	34	53	45	27	72	47	58	71
PA	64	34	92	61	23	48	84	74	9	41	60	67	46	44	64	85
Div.	0-1	1-0	1-0	0-1	3-0	0-1	1-1	0-2	2-0	0-0	1-1	0-2	1-0	1-1	1-2	1-1
NFC	1-1	1-0	1-1	0-2	3-0	2-1	1-2	0-3	2-0	1-0	1-2	0-2	3-0	1-1	1-2	1-2
WEEK																
1	at Hou	at Jac	IND	MIN*	at GB	at Was*	CHI	SEA	at Car	at Cle	ATL	BAL	at Det	DEN	SF	at Ari
2	NYG	WAS	at Phi	at Dal	DET	CAR	NO	at Chi	TB	at GB	at Min	at Atl	ARI	at SF	at Sea	STL
3	at SF	Open	at Sea	at Hou	at Min	CHI	at Det	GB	at NO*	ATL*	at TB	CAR	NYG	at Ari	STL	PHI
4	GB*	at Ten	Open	JAC	SEA	at Buf	at Phi*	at Stl	ARI	at Car	NO	Open	at Chi	DET	at Atl	at KC
5	DAL	at Phi	WAS	at NYG	BUF	DET	STL	at Min	Open	TB	CLE	at NO	Open	at GB	KC	OAK
6	at NO	HOU	at Atl	TEN	at Ari*	Open	Open	BUF	NYG	PHI	at Bal	CIN	at Stl	SEA	CHI*	SD
7	at TB	NYG*	at Dal*	at Ind	Open	at Sea	at Mia	at NYJ	PIT	Open	at Cin	PHI	MIN	Open	at Oak	Open
8	JAC	at Car	TB	Open	SF	NE*	ARI	Open	at Cin	BAL	DAL	at NYG	at KC	at SD	at GB	at Chi
9	Open	at Was	HOU	DAL	MIA	at SF	at Buf	ATL	at Det	at TB	Open	NO	OAK*	KC	Open	MIN
10	WAS	at Ari	CHI	at Phi	at NYG	GB	at Min	SF	CLE	at Pit	TB*	at Car*	STL	at Sea	DAL	at Det
11	TEN	IND	at Jac*	at TB	at NYJ	at Mia	NE	at Ari	at Bal	CIN	STL	WAS	at SF	at Car	DET	SEA
12	at Ind	TB§	at Ten	CAR	at NE	ARI	at Sea*	MIA§	NO	at Atl	at Was	at Dal§	GB*	SF	at Min	at Stl
13	CAR*	at NYG	DAL	ATL	MIN	at Chi	NYJ	at NE	at Was	SF	at Phi*	at Pit	at Den	ARI	at Stl	at NO
14	at Was	NO	at Car	PHI	at Stl*	at Det	at SF	MIN	at TB	at Dal	NYG	ATL	at Ari	CHI*	SEA	GB
15	at NYG	at Atl‡	PHI	at NO	TB	NYJ	DET	at GB	DAL‡	WAS	PIT	at Chi	SF†	at Oak	DEN	at Sea†
16	at Dal*	PHI*	NO	at Stl	at Det	at GB†	MIN†	CHI	CAR	at NYG	at Atl	at Cle	SD	WAS	at SF	ARI
17	ATL	DET	at Was‡	NYG‡	GB	STL	at Chi	at Dal	at Phi	CAR	at NO	SEA	at TB	at Min	at SD	at Den

Win | Loss | * Monday †Thursday ‡Saturday §Thanksgiving Day

INSIDER MATT HAYES

mhayes@sportingnews.com

Bigger isn't always better; better is better.

Leave Rutgers for the 'U'? Get a clue

He can't pick up the paper without seeing it. Can't listen to the radio, can't watch television, can't speak to a recruit without having to deal with it.

Greg Schiano is the next coach at Miami.

"I really believe it can be a special place," Schiano says.

But he's not talking about Miami.

In this day when coaches play one job off another, when loyalty seems no match for upward mobility, too many get caught up in looking for the next big thing when the best thing is right in front of them.

Rutgers is a better job than Miami.

Six years ago, Schiano's coaching peers thought he was crazy when he left his position as Miami's defensive coordinator to accept the job at Rutgers. They'll think he's certifiable when he blows off Miami again.

Soon enough, the thankless job Larry Coker has done at Miami—he's a blown interference call from having two national titles—will come to an end. The Canes will win nine games again, which won't be enough for the program's inflated ego, and they'll come calling on Schiano.

Here's why he won't listen: Every win at Rutgers is another step. Every win at Miami is another way to stave off the pack.

MIKE DERER / AP

Schiano took over an empty cupboard six years ago but is starting to surround himself with blue-chip athletes.

"The goal here every year is to win the national title," Coker says.

In other words, the only way to go is down.

Every team has bad seasons; every team struggles. Some teams lose 20 of their first 23 games under a new coach and eventually find themselves in the middle of a magical season.

With a win at South Florida this weekend, Rutgers will be 5-0 and off to its best start since the 1970s—when the schedule was full of teams from the Ivy and Patriot Leagues and no one cared much about the State University of New Jersey.

With a win this week against Houston, Coker will survive for the time being.

At Rutgers, Schiano is set up to succeed. At Miami, Coker is set up to fail.

Miami is a pro sports town with a pro sports mentality: Win or we don't show up. The facilities are atrocious. I ask you, what coach wouldn't want half-full stadiums and overflowing expectations?

Meanwhile, in Piscataway, they're dying for a winner. Back in 2001, when Rutgers was trying to lure a native son home to save the worst program in college football, Schiano came up with a list of 30 things—from improved facilities to an academic plan to competitive salaries for his assistants—that had to be accomplished in a specific time period for him to take the job.

"Every one has been met," he says.

And here's how Schiano has repaid Rutgers' integrity: When he arrived, about one out of every three players was flunking out. In his six seasons, not one player has been dismissed because of academic shortcomings.

When Schiano arrived, one player ran a 4.4 40 and the school constantly was losing big-time Jersey recruits. Now there are more than a dozen players who run 4.4 or faster, and Schiano is keeping many of the state's elite players home.

Last year, Rutgers had its first winning season since 1992 and played in a bowl game for only

speedreads

Michigan State scored 31 points in the first half against Notre Dame and lost. Don't blame Drew Stanton; blame the MSU coaches. It should be on the first page of the coaching handbook: Never lift off the pedal.

Team of the week: Army. After a gut-wrenching loss to Texas A&M, the Cadets went on the road—OK, so it was *Baylor*—and beat a BCS team in overtime. I already can't wait for Army-Navy.

I watched the Southern California-Arizona game and son of a gun if those Pac-10 officials weren't cheating again. Without seven or eight of those missed calls, Arizona could have had a chance to have an opportunity to get a break to be in position to beat USC.

KEYSTONE LIGHT presents

HAYES' 6-PACK

Florida 17, Alabama 16
The desperate Crimson Tide doesn't have enough offense for a big road win.

Utah 30, Boise State 17
Utah's defense—not its high-powered offense—will end Boise State's hopes of a BCS bowl bid.

Ohio State 17, Iowa 13
At some point, the Buckeyes slow starts on offense will cost them.

USC 33, Washington St. 17
Wazzu has just enough offense to make this interesting—for about three quarters.

Nebraska 31, Kansas 14
The Huskers will take their first step toward winning the weak Big 12 North.

Michigan 35, Minnesota 16
Memo to the Gophers: There's this guy named Manningham. Double-team him.

INSIDE DISH

Now that Southern California's running back position appears to have shaken out with freshman **Emmanuel Moody** winning the job, the Trojans have another problem: limited experience at fullback. The lead blocker is a key to the Trojans' pro-style offense, and yet another season-ending injury at the position (**Stanley Havili**'s broken leg) means the running game will have to adjust again. **Allen Bradford**, one of many freshmen competing for the starting running back spot, could move to fullback, as could LB **Luthur Brown**. Coach **Pete Carroll** has called Bradford (6-0, 230) his "big back," but there are concerns Bradford might not have a lead blocker mentality. > New Mexico QB **Chris Nelson** may have saved the Lobos' season. In the past three games, the onetime backup has led New Mexico to wins over rivals New Mexico State and UTEP. And had the Lobos' line not given up eight sacks against Missouri in Week 3, things could have been much different in a home loss to the Tigers. Looking for a sleeper in the Mountain West? New Mexico plays conference heavyweights TCU and Utah at home. > Here is why North Carolina and N.C. State will be looking for new coaches at the end of this season: Wake Forest coach **Jim Grobe** has lost his starting quarterback and running back to injuries, and the Deacons are unbeaten. UNC and N.C. State have more talent than Wake and are 3-5 combined. Both Carolina jobs are plum positions that will attract big names. Don't be surprised if one of those names is a **Bowden–Terry**, that is. > Lost among the hype surrounding Ohio State's offense is the play of a revamped secondary. What began the season as a question mark quickly has developed into the strength of the defense. CBs **Malcolm Jenkins**, **Andre Amos** and **Antonio Smith** are aggressive in man coverage and allow the unit to gamble more with linebacker and safety blitz packages. Jenkins is playing better than any corner in the country. > Look for Texas to file a complaint with the Big 12 office about the leg whip that injured star DE **Brian Robison**'s knee against Iowa State. Robison could miss significant time, and the Longhorns have one game (Sam Houston State) to find a suitable replacement or rotation before the Oklahoma game October 7. Texas likely will go with a rotation of sophomores **Brian Orakpo** and **Aaron Lewis**. Orakpo (6-4, 248), a pass-rush specialist, is a bit undersized to be an every-down end; Lewis is primarily a run stuffer.

Schaeffer

JAMES CRISP / AP

Brent Schaeffer's return to the SEC has been atrocious. His passer rating is among the nation's worst, and Mississippi likely will start walk-on **Seth Adams** this week against Georgia. The Ole Miss staff must shoulder some blame for Schaeffer's problems. Schaeffer is most comfortable as a spread option passer; he flourished in that type of offense last year in junior college, and the Tennessee staff was contemplating using some spread principles before he left in 2005. Instead of using Schaeffer's dual-threat ability, Ole Miss has forced him into the play-action offense of former Miami offensive coordinator **Dan Werner** and has taken away his ability to create outside the pocket.

JAKE SCHOELLKOPF / AP

Nelson could lead the Lobos to a Mountain West championship.

the second time in school history. Four weeks into this season, the team is unbeaten and the unthinkable has happened: New York City has noticed.

When Schiano arrived, the largest media market in the world didn't care about college football, much less Rutgers. Last weekend, one of the three-letter network television affiliates in New York City led its nightly report with Rutgers—this despite the city's staring directly in the face of a Subway Series. Imagine that, Rutgers football competing with the Yankees and Mets.

"There are a group of kids, sophomores in high school, that only know Rutgers as a bowl team," Schiano says. "These next two or three years are a window of opportunity that we have made possible by the work everyone has put into this program."

So the decision is fairly cut and dried: Stay and reap the rewards of hard work or leave and get tossed into a meat grinder. When Schiano arrived at Rutgers, he said his goal was to compete for a national title one day.

"People thought I was nuts," he says.

They thought Frank Beamer was nuts, too, when he said the same thing about a sleepy university in southwestern Virginia. Years later, Virginia Tech annually is among the nation's elite.

"It would be neat to build something," Schiano says.

It would be better to stay and see it through. **SN**

RIC FELD / AP

BLOG ALERT

"It hurts me to see the Cavs struggle like this. But I think wily Al Groh is good for an upset or two this season."

Wily is as wily does when you join the conversation with Tom Dienhart and hundreds of your closest pigskin-loving friends at sportingnews.com.

SN's 12.5 *Half the size, twice the sizzle*

Rk. Team (last week)	W-L	Next up	TV (all times Eastern)
1. Ohio State (1)	4-0	at Iowa, 9/30	8 p.m., ABC
Remember, Coach Tressel, you don't *have* to win ugly when you have Troy Smith and Teddy Ginn.			
2. USC (2)	3-0	at Washington State, 9/30	7 p.m., TBS
Bottom line: SC's defense is better than its offense. Not that there's anything wrong with that.			
3. Auburn (3)	4-0	at South Carolina, 9/28	7:30 p.m., ESPN
See that end zone, fellas? Keep Sidney Rice the hell out of it.			
4. West Virginia (4)	4-0	at Mississippi State, 10/7	None
The Mountaineers were sloppy on offense at East Carolina, but that's what bye weeks are for.			
5. Michigan (6)	4-0	at Minnesota, 9/30	7:45 p.m., ESPN
A dome game against the Gophs will show the country what Michy's defense is all about.			
6. Florida (7)	4-0	Alabama, 9/30	3:30 p.m., CBS
How strange to say this in reference to Bama, but the Gators better not be looking ahead to LSU.			
7. LSU (5)	3-1	Mississippi State, 9/30	12:30 p.m., Lincoln Financial
If there's one thing easier in today's SEC than a bye week, it's a Sly week.			
8. Texas (8)	3-1	Sam Houston State, 9/30	None
If Sammy Houston were an offensive tackle, he'd go about 6-1, 225.			
9. Louisville (9)	4-0	at Middle Tennessee, 10/6	8 p.m., ESPN2
Please, please, please keep Hunter Cantwell safe in practice.			
10. Georgia (11)	4-0	at Mississippi, 9/30	9 p.m., ESPN2
When you've got a third-string QB who can play like that, life is good.			
11. Virginia Tech (12)	4-0	Georgia Tech, 9/30	3:30 p.m., ABC
All right, Hokies, now let's see what you can do against a *real* team.			
12. Notre Dame (10)	3-1	Purdue, 9/30	2:30 p.m., NBC
If every game were as good as the last one, the Irish could form their own pay-per-view network.			
12.5 Wake Forest			
Maybe it won't last, but the Deacs are 4-0—all against BCS teams—and that is dang big-time.			

BOTTOM 5

Alabama's poor kicker. It's possible Leigh Tiffin isn't the best L.T. since Lawrence Taylor.
Wisconsin's playbook. At the end of the day, "Hut, hut, hike" really isn't all that creative.
Florida Atlantic. The Owls actually made Steve Spurrier's offense look halfway decent.
John Bunting. But you knew that already.
It hurts to say it—but JoePa. The Nittany Lions haven't looked this inept on offense since he was a strapping lad of 77.

Wrangler

PLAYER OF THE WEEK

QB Joe Cox, Georgia

Cox, a redshirt freshman, threw the first two touchdown passes of his career in the final 10 minutes—the last with 46 seconds to play—of Georgia's 14-13 victory over still-winless Colorado. Cox took over for freshman Matthew Stafford late in the third quarter. Georgia entered the final quarter facing its first shutout loss since 1995.

RIC FELD / AP

Hear from SN's Player of the Week on The Tim Brando Show, weekdays from 3-6 p.m. ET on Sporting News Radio, or at radio.sportingnews.com.

Wrangler Real. Comfortable. Jeans.

Tom Dienhart's

QUICK *SLANTS*

tdienhart@sportingnews.com

Why isn't anyone talking about Houston quarterback Kevin Kolb for the Heisman?

While the nation is babbling about Adrian Peterson and Troy Smith, Kolb has moved into their company. I have a Heisman vote, and I've moved Kolb into my top three candidates. Yeah, he's that good.

This is Kevin Kolb. He is good. Do we have to tell you everything?

JOHN ROWLAND / THE LAFAYETTE DAILY ADVERTISER / AP

Check it out: Kolb is tied for first in the nation in touchdown passes—he has 12 with just one pick. His stats are sparkling, and Houston is 4-0 after Kolb sliced up Oklahoma State, 34-25, last Saturday with 21-of-28 passing for 313 yards and four touchdowns.

Here's more: Kolb is the NCAA active career leader in completions, passing yards and total offense.

Is Kolb going to win the Heisman? Probably not. We all know the bronze bauble is reserved for BCS glamour boys. But it would be a victory—and sweet justice—for Kolb and a rising Cougars program if he could get to New York for the ceremony. This weekend, he has a great chance to further his Heisman legitimacy—the Cougars are playing Miami.

CAMPUS WATCH

Views from the student section at sportingnews.com

BIG BLOG ON CAMPUS

From Shaun Moore, Washington's *Husky Digest*

Last Saturday's game against UCLA was a roller-coaster ride that made me almost revisit that chicken burrito I had for lunch but in the end left me wanting another go-round.

Something started to click for the offense late in the second quarter. Suddenly, there were lanes for Isaiah Stanback to run in, and Sonny Shackelford was getting free in the secondary. The Huskies took another giant step. The win against Fresno State left many fans with a belief that this team was about to turn the page, but beating the Bruins by battling from behind shows that this team has something Washington has been missing for three years: poise.

The Pulse

	1	2	3
Favorite party night	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Best drinking game	Beer Pong	Flip Cup	Circle of Death
Undefeated teams by season's end	Three	Four	None

As voted on by SN's national network of college bloggers

INSIDER LEE SPENCER

lspencer@sportingnews.com

This isn't the 24 team of old, but it's still a championship contender.

You better not overlook Gordon

With all the hype and prognostication surrounding the Chase for the NASCAR Nextel Cup, why wasn't there more buzz about Jeff Gordon?

Could it be because Gordon didn't make the Chase last season? Or because Gordon was near the bottom of the Chase pool entering the postseason? Or maybe because his story simply isn't as compelling as the other nine drivers' in the Chase?

Whatever the reason, it would be foolish for any contender to underestimate Gordon. He made that clear at Dover with his second third-place finish in a Chase race. Gordon climbed to second in the points standings, just 6 behind the leader, Jeff Burton.

But should this be a surprise? Gordon is the only four-time Cup champion among active drivers, and he also leads with 75 career wins and 55 poles.

During the Chase races last year, Gordon's team began preparing for 2006. The team had experienced a lull at intermediate tracks, which make up more than a third of the schedule. Gordon and the team knew it was time to try a different approach, especially considering the success of his three Hendrick Motorsports teammates on the 1.5-mile tracks.

ALAN MARLER FOR SN

Gordon isn't getting much attention, but he's a legitimate title contender.

Gordon and the No. 24 crew tried their teammates' setups and eventually hit on something that Gordon found comfortable and that suited his driving style. Different shocks and springs played a part, and the team also manipulated the

speedreads

Kevin Harvick made the right decision to stay in the No. 29 car rather than opting for another ride. Changing cars did not turn out well for **Kurt Busch** or Jamie McMurray.

ALAN MARLER FOR SN

It's not surprising International Speedway Corp. is revisiting Denver as a potential site for a new NASCAR track. Elsewhere, ISC never will give up its pursuit of a New York City track, but Seattle might not be worth the fight. I like Vancouver.

Give crew chief Kevin Hamlin credit for the solid progress with Dave Blaney and Bill Davis Racing's No. 22 car. Three finishes of 12th or better is admirable for a team with no factory support.

TURN RECEIPTS INTO REWARDS

With NASCAR RacePoints,™ your Sunoco receipt could turn into NASCAR®-licensed collectibles, merchandise and apparel. Earn 200 RacePoints per fill-up. And more with each qualified APlus purchase.*

APlus OFFICIAL PIT STOP NASCAR

NASCAR CHASE FOR THE RACEPOINTS — THE NASCAR® ALL-ACCESS EXPERIENCE

SUNOCO — OFFICIAL FUEL NASCAR

*Minimum 10 gallon fill-up.

Rewards Program details available at participating Sunoco stations. Void where prohibited. Offer ends November 19, 2006. While supplies last.

PRESENTED BY

Earn RacePoints at these locations. Get details and register at www.nascar.com

Bank of America RACING · NASCAR DRIVEN BY DIRECTV · NASCAR Dominos Pizza · Enterprise · NASCAR.COM SUPERSTORE · APlus NASCAR · SUNOCO OFFICIAL FUEL NASCAR

NASCAR Chase for the RacePoints Sweepstakes. No purchase necessary. Void where prohibited. Must be registered member of the NASCAR RacePoints Program, a legal U.S. resident, 18 years of age or older to enter. Register for free online at NASCAR.COM (the "website") or by telephone at 1-866-579-RACE (7223). Sweepstakes begins 9/1/06 and ends 12/31/06. Official rules, entry details and prize restrictions available at the website. NASCAR® is a registered trademark of the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, Inc. NASCAR, NASCAR RacePoints,™ and RacePoints™ are trademarks of NASCAR, Inc. and are used under license by NMP, LLC. NASCAR, Inc. is not a sponsor of this promotion. ©2006 Sunoco, Inc. (R&M) All rights reserved.

FACTS FROM RACING HISTORY.

1963:

Valvoline makes its first Indy appearance with the legendary Andy "Mr. 500" Granatelli and his STP Novis—the start of what would lead to five Indy 500® victories for Valvoline.

Valvoline.

TESTED ON THE TRACK. TRUSTED ON THE ROAD.

car's body angle.

Car chief Steve Letarte was promoted to crew chief before the Chase began last season, and every member on Gordon's over-the-wall squad except the jackman was changed. It takes time for front- and rear-tire changers and carriers to get acclimated to each other's moves.

Gordon didn't expect his team to come out like gangbusters at Daytona, but he believed the crew would hit its stride by midsummer—about the time Gordon won twice, at Sonoma and Chicago, in three races. Winning at Chicago was the turnaround point of the No. 24's season and proved the team's intermediate program was on track.

The Chase rolls into Kansas Speedway this week, and Gordon has two wins and an average finish of 6.0 at Kansas, the best of any driver.

"If there's any track that is similar to Chicago, it's Kansas," Gordon says. "As good as our stuff was at Chicago, I think we'll be pretty close."

Gordon says the two tracks that worry him most are Texas and Phoenix—two of the three tracks where he has not won. (Homestead is the third.) His troubles at Texas date to 1999 when a blown tire resulted in one of the hardest hits of Gordon's career. Since then he has posted four top fives there, but his average finish at Texas is 17.5.

Gordon's momentum has been building steadily since Chicago. This isn't the Rainbow Warriors crew that put up double-digit wins in 1996, 1997 and 1998, but this isn't the same NASCAR, either.

If older and wiser counts for anything, expect the driver formerly known as Wonderboy to battle to the end. **SN**

TAKE5

Things overheard between some Dallas Cowboys players and Terry Labonte at Texas Motor Speedway

1. Where's the door handle?
2. I can finally outrun T.O.
3. Relieving yourself in your driver's suit gives a whole new meaning to "playing dirty."
4. Our cheerleaders are better than your pit lizards.
5. Hey Iceman, are Kellogg's Corn Flakes better than steroids?

L.M. OTERO / AP

JAY DROWNS / SN

HAROLD HINSON FOR SN

BLOG ALERT

"Kevin Harvick's season will prove once and for all that the car is more important than the driver. In this era, at least."

Disagree? Tell Matt Crossman his keyboard is more important than him at sportingnews.com.

But Maria looks better in a skirt

Jack Roush is considering selling part of Roush Racing to Red Sox owner John Henry. That makes sense because until 2004 the Red Sox were baseball's Mark Martin—Roush's marquee driver. He has come agonizingly close but still hasn't won a title. Other NASCAR drivers have counterparts in sports, too.

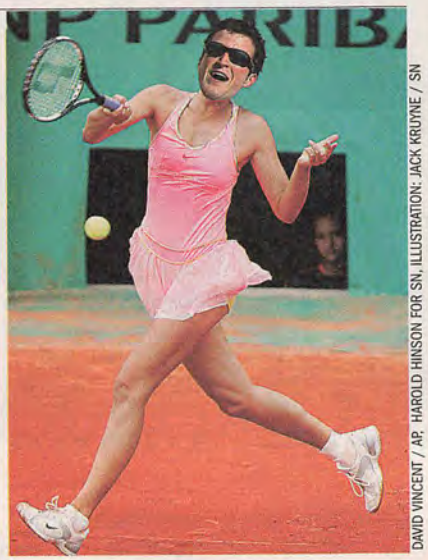
Jeff Gordon. The Yankees, of course. Hate them both because they win.

Matt Kenseth. Every male tennis player. Yeah, he's successful, but as hard as you try, you can't formulate an opinion about him.

Jimmie Johnson. Peyton Manning. Both are regular-season dynamos. Each must win a championship to validate his stardom.

HAROLD HINSON FOR SN; ILLUSTRATION: JACK KRUYNE / SN

Tony Stewart. The Raiders. For next season's paint scheme, Stewart's No. 20 car should be all black with metal studs.

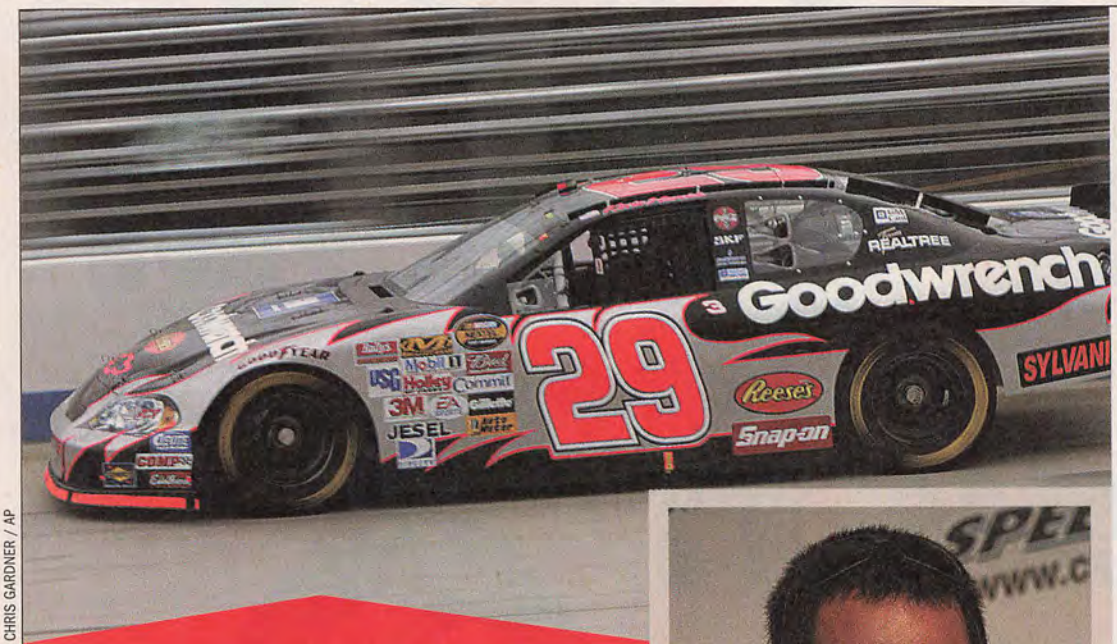


DAVID VINCENT / AP; HAROLD HINSON FOR SN; ILLUSTRATION: JACK KRUYNE / SN

Kasey Kahne. Maria Sharapova.

—Matt Crossman

Gillette YOUNG GUNS
NASCAR
Introducing
Gillette
FUSION
The only razor used by the Gillette Young Guns
ON THE FRONT
5 Blade Shaving Surface™ Technology for ultimate comfort
ON THE BACK
1 Precision Trimmer Blade for those tricky places
THE BEST SHAVE EVER
Gillette Fusion
Gillette Fusion POWER
Gillette
The Best a Man Can Get™
In Manual and Battery-power
www.GilletteYoungGuns.com
The Official Shaving Products of NASCAR
NASCAR® is a registered trademark of the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing Inc. All trademarks shown are used with permission of their respective owners.



CHRIS GARDNER / AP

INSIDE DISH

If there were mulligans in the Chase for the NASCAR Nextel Cup, **Kevin Harvick** could have used one Sunday at Dover. Harvick, who held a 35-point lead over **Denny Hamlin** going into the race, took a hit in the standings after his engine failed. It is the first race Harvick has not completed this season. His 32nd-place finish dropped him to fifth in points, 54 behind leader **Jeff Burton**, one of Harvick's teammates at Richard Childress Racing.

Montoya

HAROLD HINSON FOR SN

After a two-month wait and a mid-seven-figure buyout from McLaren-Mercedes, former Formula 1 driver **Juan Pablo Montoya** is free to start the next chapter of his racing career with **Chip Ganassi**. "We felt it was worth it because he's going to have an intensive testing program ahead of him," Ganassi says. "But five to six races into next season, he'll be grateful." Three months full of testing will start this week. Montoya was to test ARCA cars Monday at Talladega and Friday at Iowa. In the middle of the week, he planned to test NASCAR cars at Kentucky Speedway. Ganassi says testing on a short track, intermediate track and superspeedway over a five-day stretch will allow the company to evaluate Montoya's progress and decide which is the best type of track for Montoya to make his NASCAR debut. Ganassi expects Montoya to run Busch races first, then add Cup races to his schedule. **Donnie Wingo** will be Montoya's crew chief.

John Henry's Fenway Sports Group is negotiating to buy into Roush Racing. But **Jack Roush** has no plans to relinquish majority ownership. Money buys speed, and with Toyota entering the Cup level next season, Roush is looking for ways to keep up. Roush says one of the greatest benefits of a relationship with FSG would be the enormous fan base that comes with the Red Sox organization. "He owns the Northeast, and that's where (NASCAR) is not as strong," Roush says. > Roush says **Todd Kluever**, who once was the heir apparent to drive the No. 6 car next season, "is not out of the picture," but he has moved from a "certainty to a possibility." **David Ragan**, the heir apparent of the week, didn't fare well in his Cup debut at Dover. Ragan, 20, qualified 37th and wrecked twice before 50 laps were on the board. He finished 42nd. > **Bobby Ginn**'s recent purchase of MB2 Motorsports has enabled the team to expand its driver development program. **Regan Smith**, who ran a component test for MB2 last week at Kentucky with crew chief **Ryan Pemberton**, is expected to compete in Cup and Busch races next year. **Kraig Kinser**, 21, will attend an ARCA test with the company on Friday. Kinser has been racing trucks. > Though **Mark Martin** insists he'll run a partial Cup schedule in 2007, he hasn't dismissed returning to a full schedule in 2008. Martin is expected to share a 2007 Cup ride with **Boris Said** and a driver yet to be announced, possibly Busch Series regular **Jon Wood**. > **Cal Wells** says he has a backup plan for next season if he loses Tide as a primary sponsor. There also has been talk that driver **Travis Kvapil** is a candidate to drive for Michael Waltrip Racing, but Wells says Kvapil will return in the No. 32 Chevrolet next year.

DOWN THE ROAD

presented by Castrol GTX

Banquet 400 **When:** 1:30 p.m. ET Sunday
● **TV:** NBC ● **Length:** 400 miles/267 laps

Castrol GTX
Sludge robs your car of power and acceleration. Castrol GTX: Maximum protection against sludge buildup.

YOU CAN'T SEE SLUDGE COMING.

GTX CAN.

Fight back against sludge with the superior sludge protection of Castrol GTX. Its new anti-sludge formula hammers sludge before it can build up in your engine. GTX is so powerful, it passed the industry's toughest sludge standard.* Not all oils did. You can't see sludge coming. Better get something that can. Castrol GTX. Check out castrol.com/us for more information.

IT'S MORE THAN JUST OIL. IT'S LIQUID ENGINEERING.™ Castrol™

*GTX 5W-30 and 10W-30

presents

Kansas *Speedway*

TRACK facts

Location: Kansas City, Kan.
Front stretch: 2,685 feet
Back stretch: 2,207 feet
Banking in Turns 1-4: 15°
Banking front stretch: 10.4°
Banking back stretch: 5°
Distance: 1.5 miles
Most wins: 2, Jeff Gordon
Most top 5s: 3, Ryan Newman, Gordon
Chase race winners: Mark Martin, 2005; Joe Nemechek, 2004
Website: kansasspeedway.com

Kevin Harvick's scouting report

"Kansas is really starting to come into its own. It's very similar to Chicago, just not quite as fast. It's kind of a mix between Chicago and Las Vegas. We seem to run well on any kind of mile-and-a-half racetrack. The fastest groove is still right on the bottom, with the possibility of two grooves coming in during the race. You fight a lot of front-end push up off the corners throughout the entire weekend. This place is definitely a track position and fuel mileage racetrack."

CHASE DRIVERS AT KANSAS

	Races	Avg. finish	Wins	Top 5s	Top 10s	Laps/Led	DNF	Avg. start	Poles	Driver rating	Season points
Jeff Burton	5	19.2	0	0	0	1,289/4	1	26.2	0	48.2	5,351
Jeff Gordon	5	6.0	2	3	4	1,335/169	0	10.4	0	103.9	5,345
Matt Kenseth	5	19.4	0	1	2	1,259/85	1	18.6	1	116.8	5,333
Denny Hamlin	1	32.0	0	0	0	265/0	0	7.0	0	50.8	5,333
Kevin Harvick	5	18.4	0	0	1	1,227/49	1	22.8	0	69.0	5,297
Mark Martin	5	14.4	1	1	2	1,318/141	1	21.4	0	135.7	5,276
Dale Earnhardt Jr.	5	20.0	0	0	2	1,294/22	1	14.4	1	35.7	5,249
Jimmie Johnson	4	13.8	0	0	3	1,039/21	1	7.2	1	105.6	5,215
Kasey Kahne	2	15.5	0	0	0	534/39	0	22.0	0	66.1	5,169
Kyle Busch	2	29.0	0	0	0	403/0	1	27.5	0	65.8	5,127

Pit box

Who will win at Kansas?

Fantasy experts Roger Kuznia and Vinnie Iyer pick Nextel Cup race winners.

Vinnie: Kasey Kahne has five victories at intermediate tracks this season, so I am going with him in this pivotal Pit Box race. Nine is my favorite number, and with a little luck Kahne will feast on the Banquet 400 field this time around. He always drives to win, and I need a victory to regain the lead from Roger.

- **Sleeper:** Carl Edwards.
- **Not so fast:** Denny Hamlin.

Roger: Matt Kenseth's luck at Kansas changed in 2005, when he qualified on the pole, led 71 laps and finished a career-best fifth. Earlier this year at Chicago—a track very similar to Kansas—Kenseth led in the closing laps before Jeff Gordon sent him spinning. I'm betting Kenseth will be bad-fast again.

- **Sleeper:** Kurt Busch.
- **Not so fast:** Elliott Sadler.

Nextel Cup points (based on how the experts' choices finished in points races): Roger 2,730; Vinnie 2,700.
Follow their running feud at sportingnews.com/nascar/pitbox.

HAROLD HINSON FOR SN (3)

THE FINAL WORD

Did you ever hear the urban legend that Pink Floyd's "Dark Side of the Moon" syncs up perfectly with *The Wizard of Oz*? A similar coincidence exists with races at Kansas. Start a tape of last year's Kansas race at the same time as this year's race and you'll see creepy similarities. A Roush driver will take a huge lead during long green-flag runs. Other drivers will concoct failed pit road strategies in an effort to take the lead. Yep, we're still in Kansas, and no, that's not a munchkin in victory lane. It's **Mark Martin**. *—Matt Crossman*

Gentlemen, stop your engines

New high performance beds

Roll on into one of the new, fresh, crisp beds at Fairfield Inn.®
And rev up your Marriott Rewards® points at any of our over 500 locations.
Fairfield Inn. For travelers who know.℠

Call 1-800-MARRIOTT or visit Marriott.com/fairfieldinn

© 2006 Marriott International, Inc.

RACKSIDE SERVICES: №2

Las Vegas 2005.

Whether a driver needs a uniform, a team needs a critical part, or a race official needs a checkered flag, the only delivery truck you'll see trackside every weekend is the Big Brown Truck℠.

Official delivery company of

NASCAR

NASCAR® is a registered trademark of the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, Inc. © 2006 United Parcel Service of America, Inc. UPS, the UPS brandmark, and the color brown are registered trademarks of United Parcel Service of America, Inc. All rights reserved.

racing.ups.com

ups

NASCAR DRIVER REPORTS

Driver reports, written by Lee Spencer, will appear next in the November 3 issue.

How can these guys get back to the top next season?

Tony Stewart

Despite having the same incredible team and top equipment, Smoke has been driving hurt most of the season. Stewart had the flu in the offseason and early in the season, was injured at the Chili Bowl in January and suffered several accidents in competition before rolling a car at a charity event in September. Stewart has immense talent, but he has been in poor physical shape for most of his Cup career and the body simply doesn't recover as quickly at 35 as it does at 25. Stewart has vowed to hire a live-in trainer. If he does, the rest of the field better look out.

GREG BIFFLE He says the No. 16 was not prepared to compete at a championship level this season. Engine failure at California in the spring put the team into a hole early—Biffle was 38th in points going into the third race of the season. He ran out of gas three times before the team was able to fix that problem. The No. 16 also had difficulties adapting to the new tire compounds, which was evident in Biffle's inconsistency all season. Biffle can use the remainder of the season as a testing session for 2007.

RYAN NEWMAN Before this season, he hadn't finished worse than seventh in points since becoming a full-time Nextel Cup driver, but he never was a player in 2006. The team fell behind when it continued to work on the Intrepid while other Dodge teams had moved on with the Charger. So much time was spent getting the car comfortable to race that the team couldn't focus on qualifying and the Rocketman, who had won 35 poles in 152 starts entering his fifth full season, has started in the front just twice in 2006. This team is not accustomed to starting farther back, and that was especially telling on intermediate tracks—the weakest part of the No. 12's game. Dodge's new nose for 2007 is closer to the Intrepid package, which is expected to give Newman equal footing on intermediate tracks.

KURT BUSCH It's easy to blame Busch's struggles on getting used to a new team and new systems at Penske Racing. The No. 2 car always had been relatively competitive, but Busch did not inherit **Rusty Wallace**'s 2005 group. This was a new team with a new crew chief, but given the previous issues between the Nos. 2 and 12 teams, this season didn't figure to be a cakewalk for Busch. The key to his improvement will be making time to test and becoming more familiar with the cars and team.

HAROLD HINSON FOR SN (2)

Since Osborne left, Edwards hasn't been doing much flipping.

CARL EDWARDS Edwards is the consummate driver-athlete and gives his all every lap, but owner **Jack Roush**'s decision to split up Edwards and crew chief **Bob Osborne** killed the No. 99's chemistry and any chance of competing for the title. If a reunion is not in the cards, changes must be made to find the comfort zone—and success—Edwards experienced in 2005.

racing.ups.com

Only UPS delivers when NASCAR needs it most.
Official delivery company of NASCAR.

ups

INSIDER MIKE BERARDINO

At long last, Carlos Delgado will be playing in October.

Welcome to the postseason, big fella

Shawn Green knows what it's like to be on The List. The two-time All-Star outfielder played more than 1,500 career games before he finally removed his name from The List. His 2004 Dodgers weren't dazzling, but at least they finally got Green to the playoffs.

"Even though it was brief—four games—it was nice getting a chance to play in October," Green says. "Some guys are fortunate when it comes to the playoffs. Guys on the Yankees make the playoffs every year. The rest of us really appreciate getting the opportunity because it doesn't come very often."

Thanks to a late-season trade that sent him from the Diamondbacks to the Mets, Green is heading back to the playoffs. Better still, he's going with longtime friend Carlos Delgado, who happens to top The List these days.

He has made two All-Star trips, hit 407 home runs and played more than 1,700 career games in the big leagues, but the Mets first baseman never has experienced baseball's postseason.

"I guess I haven't been in the right place at the right time," says Delgado, 34.

He just missed the playoffs at the start of his career with the Blue Jays, arriving in Toronto for one end-of-the-year regular-season at-bat in 1993. It took him until 1996 to stick in the majors, and by then the Jays' back-to-back World Series titles were a distant memory.

Delgado missed the playoffs by four games in 1998 and 4½ in 2000, but that's the closest he got in nine seasons with the Blue Jays.

A's catcher Jason Kendall (1,539 games) and center fielder Mark Kotsay (1,278) also will play in their first postseason games this October. That means three of the seven longest playoff droughts are about to end.

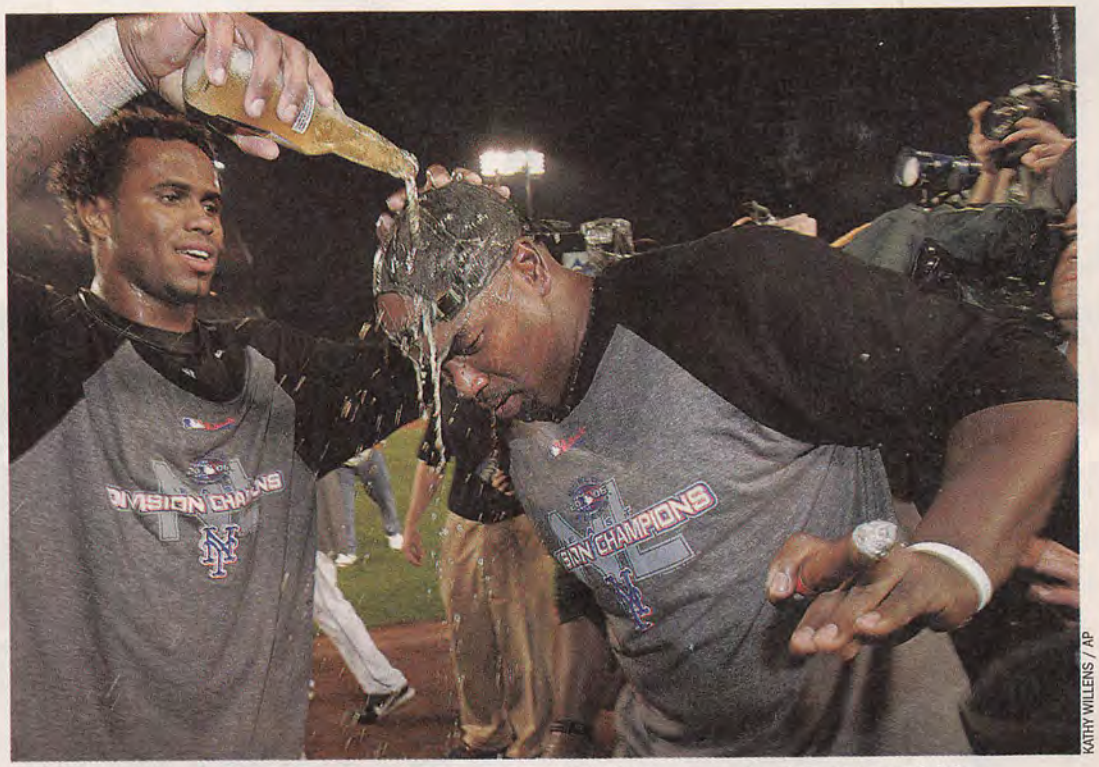
That leaves Jeromy Burnitz at the top of The Soon To Be Revised List. The Pirates outfielder has played in 1,691 career regular-season games, easily outdistancing Brewers infielder Jeff Cirillo (1,535).

Diamondbacks infielder Damion Easley (1,512) and Rockies first baseman Todd Helton (1,417) round out a top four nobody wants to make.

"Every athlete will tell you that's the reason they play—to have the opportunity to win," Delgado says. "Kendall is a great player, and he's going to have that opportunity as well. It is cool."

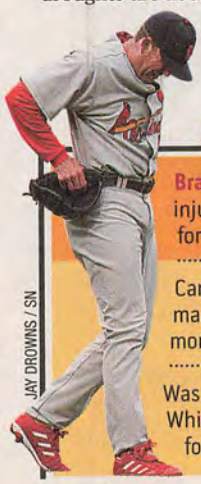
Green, who came up through the Blue Jays' minor league system with Delgado, says both men assumed they would make regular trips to the postseason. That it turned out otherwise only makes this opportunity sweeter.

"It's not (escaping) The List so much as I'm happy for Carlos to get a chance to experience October," Green says. "He is the kind of guy that you'd expect to be in the playoffs every year. He's



KATHY WILLENS / AP

Delgado's work year just got one month longer—and a whole lot messier—but he's not complaining.



JAY DROWNS / SN

speedreads

Braden Looper blew his first save chance filling in for injured closer Jason Isringhausen, but the Cardinals are fortunate to have someone with 103 career saves to step in.

Can't blame Reds G.M. Wayne Krivsky because the trades he made didn't secure a playoff spot. At least he tried, which is more than some of his peers can say.

Was there a bigger disappointment this year than the White Sox? Count on G.M. Kenny Williams to tweak the formula again this winter.

INSIDE DISH

Though most speculation has the Cubs going after **Fredi Gonzalez** or **Joe Girardi**, keep an eye on **Lou Piniella**. One N.L. executive says the former Devil Rays manager is "definitely on the Cubs' radar." Sweet Lou won't come cheap, and the Phillies still could go after him if they wind up missing the playoffs under **Charlie Manuel**. Phillies G.M. **Pat Gillick** and Piniella were successful together in Seattle. > Rookies are thriving in both leagues, and some wonder whether that is because of the anti-amphetamines policy that's finally in place. In theory, rookies adjust better than veterans to playing without such artificial aids. "It sounds interesting, but it's hard to quantify," one G.M. says. "I don't know much effect that has had. My gut says no to that one. Talent is what carries you all the time. I don't believe the pill was doing it." > Yankees 2B **Robinson Cano** has as many doubles (23) since coming off the disabled list August 8 as 3B **Alex Rodriguez** has all season. "I'm running hard out of the box and thinking double every time," Cano says. "That's the easiest way to get into scoring position." > Even if Cano falls short of the 502 plate appearances needed to qualify for the A.L. batting title, he still could win on the so-called **Tony Gwynn** rule, Major League Baseball Rule 10.23(a). Under the rule, however many plate appearances Cano falls short of 502 would be added to his at-bats total at the end of the year. If the resulting average were the highest in the league, Cano would be declared the batting champion. That's how Gwynn, with 498 plate appearances, beat out **Ellis Burks** a decade ago.

> Baseball recently lost one of its all-time great characters when former executive **Syd Thrift** died at 77 after undergoing knee replacement surgery. His work with the Royals Baseball Academy in the early 1970s was far ahead of its time. He counted among his discoveries **Frank White**, **Jim Leyland**, **Jim Bowden**, **Rickey Henderson**, **Moises Alou** and **Al Oliver**.

> The Padres pitching staff is challenging for the league ERA title under coach **Darren Balsley**. His mantra? Throw a four-seam fastball because it's easier to control than a sinking two-seamer. As a result, several soft-tossing Padres—RHPs **Chris Young**, **Woody Williams** and **Trevor Hoffman**—are adept at inducing popups.

> Though the Pirates have a winning record since the All-Star break, one former player suggests his old team should make some bold moves this offseason. "If they're smart they'll trade **Jack Wilson**, move **Freddy Sanchez** to shortstop and put **Jose Bautista** at third. Bautista's not an outfielder; he's a third baseman. You wouldn't lose much putting Freddy at short, and trading Jack makes sense because he doesn't hit enough to justify that contract ($20.2 million over three years)."

GEORGE WIDMAN / AP

N.L. Manager of the Year front-runner **Joe Girardi** appears to be out after just one year with the Marlins, who already are compiling information about his possible successor. A source who has spoken with the Marlins' front office says Girardi has "zero" chance of returning for the second year of a three-year contract. Look for a trio of third base coaches to receive interviews: **Fredi Gonzalez** (Braves), **Joey Cora** (White Sox) and **Manny Acta** (Mets). Gonzalez, who was the Marlins' second choice behind Girardi last year, also is high on the Cubs' list. Cubs G.M. **Jim Hendry** and special assistant **Gary Hughes** know him well from their days with the Marlins because Gonzalez was a coach in the organization for 10 years.

got the leadership, the personality. He's a clutch player. He just unfortunately was in the A.L. East for so long."

In 2005, Delgado left Toronto as a free agent and had a choice between the big-market Mets and the spunky Marlins. He chose the Marlins and fell six games short of the playoffs.

Then came Fire Sale II. The Marlins looked around for a place to dump the remainder of Delgado's $52 million contract and found the Mets willing to take it.

Now, at long last, one of the game's premier sluggers is headed to the October stage with an excellent chance to make it all the way to the World Series.

"Am I happy? Yes, I'm happy," he says. "I'll be happier on October 3 when the (playoffs) actually start. And hopefully I'll be even happier by October 29 when the World Series ends, and we'll be celebrating." SN

H. RUMPH, JR. / AP

BLOG ALERT

"Let's assume Peter Angelos does wake up and smell the crab cakes this offseason ..."

Tom Gatto has a plan to fix the Orioles. You and Mr. Angelos can sneak a peek at sportingnews.com.

Hoffman will stay on top for a while

Padres closer Trevor Hoffman overtook Lee Smith as baseball's career saves leader last week, nine years after Smith retired. Hoffman likely will be No. 1 for just as long—or longer.

Hoffman, 38, is in position to go a lot higher than the 479 saves he entered the week with. He is signed through 2008. If he averages 30 saves—he has had at least 31 in every full season he has pitched since 1995—he'll be at about 540 if he hangs 'em up after 2008.

That means the No. 2 man among active closers—the Yankees' Mariano Rivera at 413—would need to average about 40 saves through 2009 to catch up with Hoffman. And there's no guarantee Rivera, who is signed only through next season, will last that long, especially after his recent elbow problems. The other active leaders probably won't get to 479, let alone the mid-500s. The Mets' Billy Wagner, 35, who had 323 at the start of the week, has the best shot.

Today's top young closers are no locks to challenge. Most would need to average at least 30 saves for another 15 or so years even to get close. And just ask Eric Gagne and Brad Lidge how fleeting a closer's existence can be. *—Tom Gatto*

LENNY IGNELZI / AP

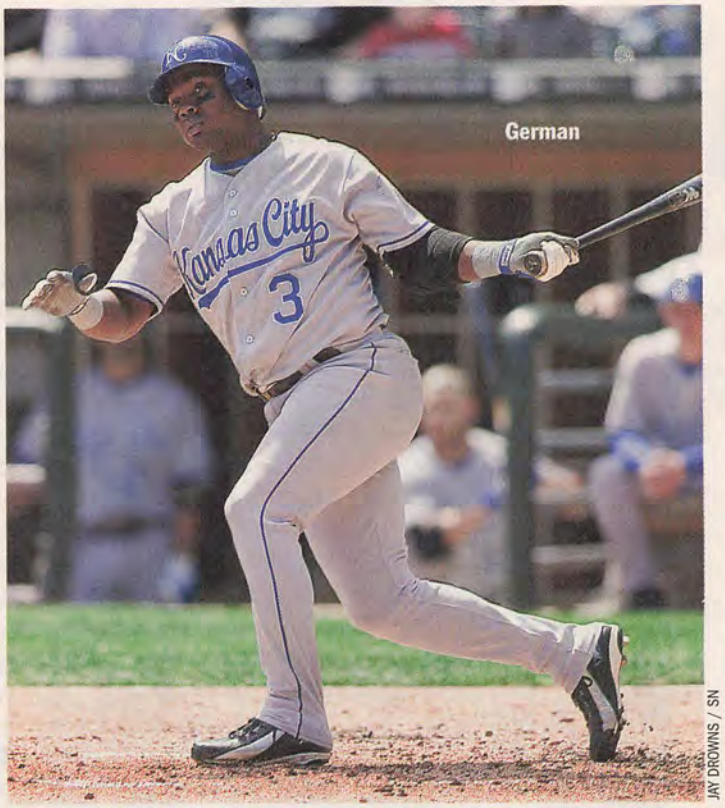
Hoffman is No. 1 in career saves and likely will tack on another 60 or so before he retires.

LHP **Juan Lara** has been effective since being called up, and he could factor into the **INDIANS'** bullpen plans for next season. Lara is able to repeat his delivery easily, which leads to good command. ... LF **Hideki Matsui**'s return decreases the role of **Melky Cabrera**, whose production was a major reason the **YANKEES** coasted to the A.L. East title. Cabrera is a solid hitter who has a knack for coming through in the clutch. He will be used as a pinch hitter and a defensive replacement in the postseason. ... The **RANGERS** aren't ready to say RF **Nelson Cruz** has won a full-time job for 2007, but his power is intriguing. Cruz needs to make better contact. ... RF **Trot Nixon** could be playing his final games for the **RED SOX**.

Nixon

ED BETZ / AP

He'll be a free agent after the season, and the team needs to open up at-bats for OF **Wily Mo Pena**. Nixon is a solid hitter, an underrated defender and a great character guy but has trouble staying healthy. ... **ROYALS** IF/OF **Esteban German** went on a tear after replacing 2B **Mark Grudzielanek** (groin), who's done for the season. German has hit well all year but hasn't had a permanent position. Second base is German's best spot, but Grudzielanek is productive and under contract for 2007. ... **Aaron Hill** will start for the **BLUE JAYS** next season, but where? Second base is his best position, but the team might have a bigger need at shortstop. Hill has hit better than .300 in four different months this year. ... C **Kenji Johjima** immediately responded—and responded with power—after the **MARINERS** put him in the No. 3 spot. He might remain there next season. ... **TIGERS** RHP **Justin Verlander** can smother hitters when he's on his game, but manager **Jim Leyland** believes Verlander works too quickly at times and that some of his mistakes could be avoided if he took the time to think through tough situations. ... **TWINS** RHP **Carlos Silva**'s decision to eliminate his curveball is paying off down the stretch. He looks more comfortable and has kept hitters off-balance by mixing up his sinker, slider and changeup. Silva has a similar release point for those three pitches. ... **ANGELS** RHP **Hector Carrasco** is finishing the season strong and is proving to be a reliable middle and setup reliever. Carrasco credits his changeup for his second half success and says he feels stronger the more he works. ... **WHITE SOX** RHP **Freddy Garcia** allowed only one hit in eight innings in two straight starts. His shoulder, which has been sore at times, feels as good as it has all season. He has been mixing in a split-finger pitch, which has been devastating. ... It's unlikely SS **Bobby Crosby** (back) will be on the **ATHLETICS'** postseason roster for the Division Series. Fill-in **Marco Scutaro** is solid but doesn't have Crosby's range, arm or power. ... Rookie RF **Delmon Young** has been thriving in the No. 2 spot in the order for the **DEVIL RAYS**. Manager **Joe Maddon** likes using Young in that spot because Young is not very selective and hitting between CF **Rocco Baldelli** and LF **Carl Crawford** gives him a chance to see some decent pitches. ... **ORIOLES** utilityman **Chris Gomez** started getting regular playing time at the start of September and responded with a 15-game hitting streak. Gomez, 35, has been contemplating retirement, but his strong finish might convince him to play one more year.



German

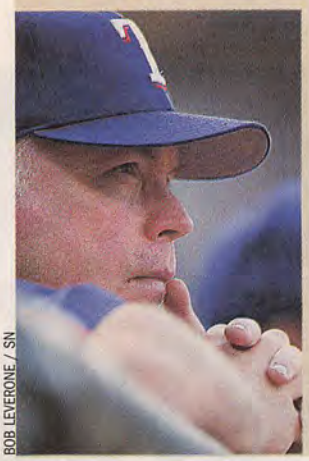
JAY DROWNS / SN

JAY DROWNS / SN

Let's get it started

The White Sox aren't likely to bring back wildly inconsistent LF **Scott Podsednik**. That will leave a hole at the top of the order, but G.M. **Ken Williams** will make filling it a top priority. He says having an effective leadoff man is as important as a basketball team's having a quality point guard. Top outfield prospects **Jerry Owens** and **Ryan Sweeney** have speed, but they may need more polish. That means Williams might opt to go outside the organization.

FOCUS: Burning issues



BOB LEVERONE / SN

The Indians' bullpen needs an overhaul, and finding an experienced closer is a must. The free-agent market for relievers is thin, so the team may need to part with some top prospects to swing a trade. ... The Tigers often struggle against pitchers who excel at working the corners of the plate. Because the hitters try to be patient they end up being too patient and let hittable pitches sail by. ... Rangers general manager **Jon Daniels** says he isn't considering a change in managers, but the Rangers haven't made the playoffs in their four years under **Buck Showalter** and frustration is growing within the organization.

Desperately seeking a southpaw

Replacing rotation-bound RHP **Jonathan Papelbon** with a new closer is the Red Sox's biggest bullpen issue, but they also must find a quality lefthanded specialist. The decision not to retain **Mike Myers** after last season crushed the team in games against Myers' new team, the Yankees, who regularly got big hits from lefthanded hitters such as CF **Johnny Damon**, 1B/DH **Jason Giambi** and RF **Bobby Abreu**.

CORRESPONDENTS: *Baltimore, Spencer Fordin; Boston, Ian Browne; Chicago, Scott Merkin; Cleveland, Anthony Castrovince; Detroit, Jason Beck; Kansas City, Dick Kaegel; Los Angeles, Mike Scarr; Minnesota, Kelly Thesier; New York, Mark Feinsand; Oakland, Mychael Urban; Seattle, Corey Brock; Tampa Bay, Bill Chastain; Texas, T.R. Sullivan; Toronto, Jordan Bastian.*

He makes 'em go

CF **Chris Duffy**'s production at the top of the order has been key to the Pirates' second half surge. Duffy has outstanding speed and is a smart baserunner who puts pressure on the defense. He must become more selective at the plate, however.

JAY DROWNS / SN

The **DODGERS**' bullpen might have trouble protecting leads in the final week. RHP **Takashi Saito**, the closer, has been hittable recently. Rookie RHP **Jonathan Broxton** and veteran RHP **Brett Tomko** have wilted down the stretch. ... **PADRES** LHP **Alan Embree** is throwing in the mid-90s again after recovering from elbow surgery last October. If the team plays the Mets in the postseason, Embree could be a pivotal figure in relief—the Mets have struggled against lefthanders this season. ... **METS** RHP **Pedro Martinez** won't say which of his maladies—a torn calf muscle or an inflamed hip—is a greater concern; he does, however, say he will be productive if healthy. ... Few teams would benefit as much from opening the playoffs at home as the **CARDINALS**. They began the week second in the N.L. in home winning percentage, and their top two starters—RHPs **Chris Carpenter** and **Jeff Suppan**—are significantly better at Busch Stadium. ... **PHILLIES** LHP **Jamie Moyer** has been effective in large part because N.L. hitters are unfamiliar with him. Moyer's changeup confuses hitters—particularly young ones—who are used to seeing frequent fastballs. ... **ASTROS** manager **Phil Garner** loves RHP **Matt Albers**' late-moving sinker. Garner believes Albers will improve after he gains better command of his pitches and becomes more confident. ... **BREWERS** rookie OF **Tony Gwynn** has struggled at the plate, but coaches were pleased to see Gwynn bunt for a hit in a close game last week. That's a sign he is willing to make adjustments. ... With their closer, RHP **Bob Wickman**, re-signed for 2007, the **BRAVES** can feel confident about their bullpen heading into the offseason. Wickman will be the anchor, and RHP **Tyler Yates** and LHP **Macay McBride** have been pitching better in the second half of the season. ... The **MARLINS** have lacked a consistent righthanded setup reliever since rookie RHP **Logan Kensing** (elbow) got hurt, which has created more work for closer **Joe Borowski** and rookie LHP **Taylor Tankersley**. Spotty late-inning relief has led to blown leads in key games. ... Rookie 2B **Ryan Theriot** is an option to bat second for the **CUBS** next season. Theriot, however, must learn to harness his aggressiveness. ... RHP **Ian Snell** has emerged as the **PIRATES**' ace and likely will be their opening day starter next year. Snell, 24, has matured this season; he has learned how to keep his emotions in check and shrug off adversity. ... The **REDS**' penchant for striking out has cost them a lot of runs this season. G.M. **Wayne Krivsky** needs to add hitters who aren't boom-or-bust types to complement his high-strikeout boppers in the middle of the order. ... Once viewed as an everyday catcher, the **DIAMONDBACKS**' **Robby Hammock** has reinvented himself as a utility player. Hammock can play third base, second base, first base, left field and right field in addition to catcher. Manager **Bob Melvin** loves having a third catcher who can play other positions. ... Manager **Felipe Alou** says RHP **Brian Wilson** has the best arm in the **GIANTS**' bullpen. Wilson's fastball is in the 94- to 98-mph range. He may need to alter his mechanics after suffering two muscle strains in his side, but he already has smoothed out a once-violent delivery. ... OF/IF **Jeff Baker** spent a full season in Class AAA this year because the **ROCKIES** wanted him to prove he could stay healthy, but the club could have used his power this summer. Baker will be a candidate to play a corner infield or corner outfield spot next season. ... The pitching-poor **NATIONALS** hope they have found a jewel in rookie RHP **Beltran Perez**, who allowed no runs and one hit in six innings last week in his first big-league start.

Albers

CHRIS PARK / AP

The power is out

The Dodgers still aren't sure what they have in 3B **Wilson Betemit**. He hit eight home runs in his first 27 games with the club, then none the next three weeks. Betemit, a switch hitter, has become a platoon player because of his struggles batting righthanded.

DANNY MOLOSHOK / AP

FOCUS: Burning issues

Will Phillies 2B **Chase Utley** heat up at the plate? When he isn't getting on base, teams are less inclined to pitch to 1B **Ryan Howard** because a base is more likely to be open. ... The Astros' No. 1 offseason task is to add offense. Potential free-agent OFs **Carlos Lee** and **Alfonso Soriano** are possible targets, but the club also must decide whether its own disappointing hitters—especially 3B **Morgan Ensberg** and OF **Jason Lane**—can bounce back in 2007. ... The Diamondbacks must improve their rotation behind RHPs **Brandon Webb** and **Livan Hernandez**. Arizona may turn to internal candidates such as RHPs **Enrique Gonzalez** and **Edgar Gonzalez** or explore trades rather than pursue expensive free agents.

BOB LEVERONE / SN

CORRESPONDENTS: *Arizona, Steve Gilbert; Atlanta, Mark Bowman; Chicago, Carrie Muskat; Cincinnati, Mark Sheldon; Colorado, Thomas Harding; Florida, Joe Frisaro; Houston, Alyson Footer; Los Angeles, Ken Gurnick; Milwaukee, Adam McCalvy; New York, Marty Noble; Philadelphia, Ken Mandel; Pittsburgh, Ed Eagle; St. Louis, Matthew Leach; San Diego, Lyle Spencer; San Francisco, Rich Draper; Washington, Bill Ladson.*

INSIDER DAVE D'ALESSANDRO

Three of the four best makeovers have taken place in one division.

Just look at these before-and-afters

This is the uncertain season, that period when most rosters are complete and when most of us still are pondering the vagaries of summer transactions. In other words, it's a good time to avoid predictions and let everybody else stick their necks out for a change.

So I'm stepping aside this week and letting the G.M.s speak. It's not that they're better informed than the rest of us—it's just that they haven't had anyone to talk to since late June. I called four execs (two East, two West) and asked them: Which teams have improved the most during the past four months? Nobody wanted to be quoted directly because they're all very, very modest. Survey says:

1 Bulls

Consensus: Full bandwagon here. Bottom line: They added exactly what they were looking for (Ben Wallace), and that's hard to do even when you have $60 million to throw around.

Testimony: "They needed to fill one spot, and they filled it with the best player at his position," G.M. 4 says. "Bar none, the best defensive team in the league. How can you not like it?"

Afterthought: "Their strength is 3s, and he's a 41 percent shooter at the line," G.M. 3 says. "I see a lot of 3-point possessions becoming 1-point possessions."

2 Pacers

Consensus: Better, tougher, younger: They basically swapped Peja Stojakovic-Anthony Johnson for Al Harrington-Marquis Daniels.

Testimony: "Al is a good fit; Peja was not a good fit," G.M. 2 says. "We already know Al can play with Jermaine (O'Neal), and he's just a more reliable scorer overall than Peja."

Afterthought: "The whole deal is point guard," G.M. 1 says. "If (Jamaal) Tinsley or Sarunas (Jasikevicius) can play, fine. But they'll really miss A.J.'s versatility if Tinsley is lame again."

3 Bucks

Consensus: T.J. Ford and Jamaal Magloire are gone, but Charlie Villanueva, Steve Blake and Ruben Patterson add aggressiveness that many felt the Bucks lacked.

Testimony: "It's about who they're building around," G.M. 4 says. "Moving (Andrew) Bogut to the five will help them, and Mo Williams is better than Ford anyway."

Afterthought: "Villanueva did his scoring for a bad team," G.M. 1 says. "He won't be the same with this team."

CRAIG JONES FOR SN

Wallace is a great addition—on one end of the court.

4 Hornets

Consensus: Veritable bonanza: acquiring Stojakovic in a sign-and-trade deal, Tyson Chandler in a trade, Bobby Jackson as a free agent and two serviceable bigs (Cedric Simmons, Hilton Armstrong) in the draft.

Testimony: "More depth, more versatility," G.M. 4 says. "They've done what everyone tries to do: improve their shooting and shot blocking."

Afterthought: "This is the one team that gets too much credit," G.M. 2 says. "On paper, they've absolutely improved. But what they've added remains to be seen." That's his nice way of calling Chandler a stiff and saying Peja is past his prime. **SN**

Dave D'Alessandro covers the NBA for The Star-Ledger of Newark, N.J.

speedread

With a few days to go until camp, **Bonzi Wells** still is unemployed and begging Houston and Denver for a midlevel exception. Moral of the story: Sometimes it doesn't pay to be a fan-hating, media-baiting coach killer.

RICH PEDRONCELLI / AP

INSIDE DISH

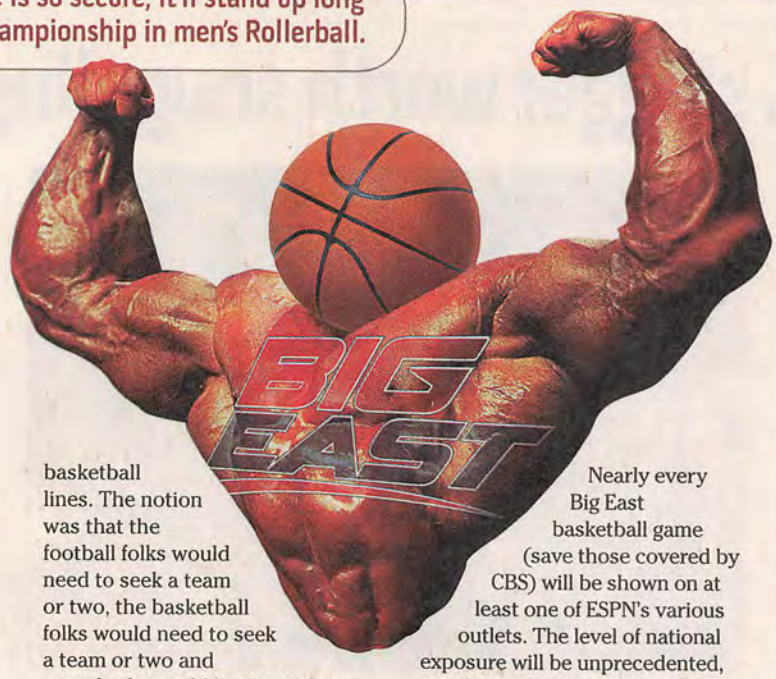
Meet PF **Pau Gasol**, grateful employee. He'll be paid $12.3 million this season even though he'll be rehabbing an injury suffered halfway around the world. According to Spanish newspaper *El Pais*, Gasol says he wants to play for a championship team. He wants the Grizzlies to be that team but won't hesitate to ask for a trade if he doesn't see progress. > Celtics PF **Al Jefferson** still must deal with ankle issues, but he made a strong statement this summer about how seriously he's taking his pro career: He has lost 30 pounds since June. Team exec **Danny Ainge** didn't believe it, but the Celts' strength coach confirmed it. > PF **Shawn Kemp**'s comeback hit yet another speed bump last week. The Bulls offered him a tryout, but he was a no-show. > **Don Nelson**'s first move as Warriors coach was to throw assistant coach **Mario Elie** off his bench—presumably because Elie had designs on his job and Nellie wasn't sure he had his loyalty. > SF **Toni Kukoc** says, "It looks like I'm done," because Chicago and Milwaukee don't want him, but agent **Herb Rudoy** is trying to get his client to stretch his wish list. > Any minute now (Friday, tentatively), the happy campers from the Knicks' debacle (**Isiah Thomas**, **Larry Brown**, **Jim Dolan**, various legal livestock) will sit down with **David Stern**, who will arbitrate how much of that $40 million Brown has coming after he was fired by Dolan et al.

The season is only a month away! Pick up where you left off in June at sportingnews.com.

INSIDER MIKE DeCOURCY

decourcy@sportingnews.com

The Big East's future is so secure, it'll stand up long enough to offer a championship in men's Rollerball.



This hybrid could run forever

It turns out those of us who were looking at burial plots for the 16-team version of the Big East Conference from the moment of its birth were extremely premature in our analysis.

The Big East might not have 16 members on the day cockroaches rule the earth, and league employees will sweat this enterprise's stability every day they punch their timecards. But those counting on an implosion—including folks at Memphis, Xavier, Central Florida and Dayton—need to concentrate on thriving in their current leagues. The supersized hybrid Big East—with some programs that emphasize football, some that dabble in it and some that don't play the game at all—is going to endure. That may be the best thing for the future of college basketball.

When Memphis, Xavier and others were snubbed in the Big East expansion process, they consoled themselves with the belief 16 was an unmanageable number and the league eventually would split along football and basketball lines. The notion was that the football folks would need to seek a team or two, the basketball folks would need to seek a team or two and everybody would be fighting over the Big East brand name.

Big East commissioner Mike Tranghese always bristled when that scenario was advanced, and as it turned out, he was right in believing it wouldn't play out that way. Three developments in the expanded league's first 12 months helped secure its future.

■ The league placed eight teams in the 2006 NCAA Tournament. No league ever had more than seven chosen for the field, but the Big(ger) East blew past that in its first attempt.

■ Half of those teams came from universities that do not have access to Division I-A football cash: Marquette, Seton Hall, Villanova and Georgetown.

■ Most recently—and most important—Tranghese and his staff completed negotiations on a boffo new ESPN television deal covering football and basketball.

Nearly every Big East basketball game (save those covered by CBS) will be shown on at least one of ESPN's various outlets. The level of national exposure will be unprecedented, and the combined basketball deals will put the league in the same neighborhood as the ACC, which pulls down $30 million annually.

All this will keep league members reasonably content and give them the time and energy to make the Big East more successful. This also is in the best interest of teams in the Atlantic 10, the Missouri Valley and Conference USA. The existence of a powerful conference that does not rely primarily on football revenue will help keep high-level basketball from being restricted to schools with access to BCS football wealth.

The Big East still must deal with the anxiety of coaches concerned that any one of them could field a decent squad yet finish in 16th place. Only 12 go to Madison Square Garden for the Big East Tournament, and coaches contend that could lead to some of them getting fired.

Every league has a bottom, though. It's just a longer trip to get there in the Big East. **SN**

speedread

Oblivious to the accumulating interest, the Ohio attorney general keeps dragging out the case won by deposed Ohio State coach Jim O'Brien. He was awarded $2.2 million because the school, in firing him, did not follow his contract terms. The attorney general declined settlement talks and appealed the award. There's a name for this: government waste.

While you were watching baseball, we kept an eye—even two—on college basketball. Catch up on everything you missed at sportingnews.com.

INSIDE DISH

When the gunfire started, Duquesne's players looked out for one another. That's the affirming element to take from the shooting of five Dukes players after an on-campus dance. Returning G **Aaron Jackson**, who was grazed by one bullet, helped protect injured G **Kojo Mensah** and drove wounded F **Stuard Baldonado** to nearby Mercy Hospital. F **Shawn James** was hit in the foot but ran to safety. F **Sam Ashaolu** was injured most severely. He was struck in the head by a bullet and still is hospitalized. Four of the injured were among 14 new players first-year coach **Ron Everhart** brought to the campus.

> After an impressive junior season that rejuvenated his appeal to scouts, Alabama F **Jermareo Davidson** spent the past several months working to add pounds to his 6-10, 220-pound frame. He lifted weights with greater intensity and paid more attention to his diet. Opponents will see a noticeable improvement.

> Freshman PG **Sherron Collins** shoots so well coming off screens that Kansas might be able to use him, junior **Russell Robinson** and sophomore **Mario Chalmers** interchangeably at the guard positions. Collins will learn point guard first, but he picks up instruction quickly and likely can learn both. The ability to vary its attack could make KU even more difficult to defend.

> In early workouts at Arizona State, new coach **Herb Sendek** has concentrated on skill development and hasn't rushed to bring in the full squad so he could introduce his Princeton-style offense. He plans to occasionally bring in five players at a time to show them the basics.

PHOTO: KEN KWOK / LONG BEACH PRESS-TELEGRAM / AP; PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY BILL WILSON / SN

DAVE KINDRED

dkindred@sportingnews.com

More a teddy bear than a linebacker, Ryan Howard is baseball's poster boy for a new era in power hitting.

A slugger worth snuggling

Let us count the ways we love Ryan Howard. One measure of his work is the numbers that put him in the Jimmie Foxx neighborhood (58) just across the street from Roger Maris (61). Soon enough, an MVP trophy will define what the big man did for the Phillies. And surely Howard is the baseball season's best story—better than the damned Yankees, better even than Methuselah, aka Julio Franco, starting at third base for the first time since Ronald Reagan was a White House rookie.

All that's good.

All that's true.

And it's just a start.

Listen, if you will, to Mike Schmidt, who knows this stuff.

"Besides being superstrong, Ryan is fearless at bat. I have a high regard for today's athlete, and he's an example of that regard. He has a wonderful temperament. He's a smart young man who's able to adapt, as we see when he's using the entire ballpark. He's a great example of how hitting has evolved into an art where even power hitters can spray the ball."

A first-ballot Hall of Fame player, Schmidt held the Phillies record for home runs in a season. He hit 48 in 1980, the first year of Ryan Howard's life. This summer Howard passed Schmidt at a high rate of speed. His 14 home runs in August alone prompted a sweet thought: Maybe Ryan Howard can pull baseball out of the abyss dug by B*nds, McGw*re, S*sa and Palmeir*.

The shame of the asterisk crowd is profound. Suspicion is the shadow that obscures their starshine. Now comes Howard. It's his first full major league season. He's a first baseman, a big, big guy, 6-4, probably 250 pounds. Baseballs fly off his bat in all directions and come down in distant places. In these times, one need not be a cynic to ask the inevitable question, one need only be awake to ask: Steroids?

ALAN DIAZ / AP

He's a good guy, he can hit, and he's clean—what's not to love about Howard?

Happily, there are good answers. Look at that body, more a Ruthian teddy bear than a B*ndsian linebacker. Look at his brothers, two more cuddly bears, only bigger. And this: Ryan Howard is the first hitter near the magic number of 60 home runs who we know has been tested for steroids and been found clean. The testing had to have happened in his minor league days that ended only last summer. With the new major league rules, he may have been tested this season as well. That we don't know, and we won't know it unless there's an answer that we really, really don't want to know.

What matters most to Mike Schmidt, a professional hitter born for the 20th century game, is that Ryan Howard is a professional hitter born for the new century. "He has an understanding of today's environment, the hardened baseballs, the light bats, the shrunken ballparks. Back in the day, power hitters were pull hitters: Johnny Bench, Ernie Banks, Eddie Mathews, Willie McCovey. We got outside the ball and pulled it. Probably no more than a third of my home runs (548) were hit to the opposite field. But Ryan Howard centers the ball on the bat and sprays it everywhere. He knows that if he gets it up in the air anywhere, it's got a good chance of going out. And he's not going to hit .260, .280 like we did. He's going to hit .315."

'If Ryan gets to 62, he'll be the first legitimate hitter to break Roger Maris' record. This guy is clean.'

—Philadelphia baseball historian Bill Kashatus

Bill Kashatus is a Philadelphia baseball historian and author whose reach extends from Connie Mack to Ryan Howard. "If Ryan gets to 62," Kashatus says, "he'll be the first legitimate hitter to break Roger Maris' record. This guy is clean." And even as Kashatus sings of Howard's hitting—"mammoth home run shots, just gigantic"—the historian notes a Howard effect outside the white lines.

"He's the first black superstar in Philadelphia baseball since Dick Allen," he says. "And in contrast to the way Allen was treated, which was abysmally, Philadelphia fans have embraced Ryan Howard. What's refreshing today is to see blacks, whites and Hispanics all coming together to the ballpark celebrating Ryan Howard and the Phillies."

"It's not hard to embrace Ryan Howard," Schmidt says. "He's a young kid with a boyish look who's just having a ball playing major league baseball. I liken him to Willie Stargell. Ryan's too young to be called 'Pops' the way Stargell was, but if you look down the road 10, 12 years, I can see him being the Willie Stargell of the Phillies."

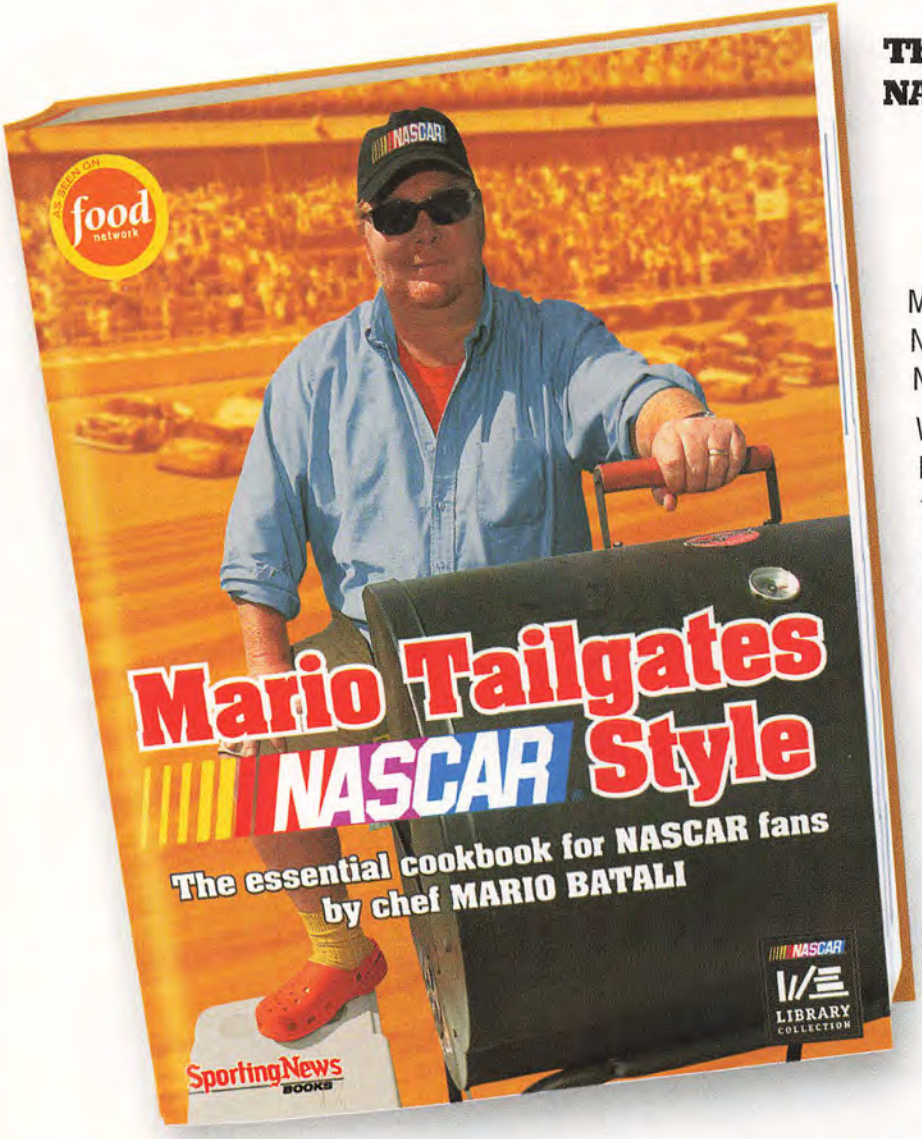
By then, maybe Pops Howard will have another number within reach.

We can hope that number is 755. **SN**

THE SPORTING NEWS (ISSN 0038-805X) October 6, 2006, Vol. 230, No. 40 is published weekly, except for one week in January and July and semi-weekly during a week in February, April, July, August, September, December and two weeks in March & November by THE SPORTING NEWS, a division of Vulcan Sports Media, Inc., 14500 S. Outer 40, Chesterfield, MO 63017. Periodicals postage paid at St. Louis, MO and additional mailing offices. For subscription service write to THE SPORTING NEWS, P.O. Box 51573, Boulder, CO 80322-1573. Subscription price is $78.00 for 60 issues. Subscribers in Canada and other countries add $46.80 per 60 issues. Air Mail rates available on request. Allow six weeks for change of address. Postmaster: Send address changes to THE SPORTING NEWS, P.O. Box 51573, Boulder, CO 80322-1573. Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, please advise us at P.O. Box 51573, Boulder, CO 80322-1573. THE SPORTING NEWS assumes no responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts, color negatives or transparencies. COPYRIGHT © 2006 Vulcan Sports Media, Inc., PRINTED IN U.S.A. CANADA GST REGISTRATION NUMBER R-124853730. Publications Mail Agreement Number 40018968. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: BleuChip International, P.O. Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2. THE SPORTING NEWS is a federally registered trademark of Vulcan Sports Media, Inc., ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED.

Audit Bureau of Circulation

Mario Tailgates NASCAR® Style



The essential cookbook for NASCAR fans by chef Mario Batali

Mario Tailgates NASCAR Style by superstar chef and NASCAR fan Mario Batali is an officially licensed NASCAR tailgating cookbook.

With its easy recipes and clear, simple instructions, Mario Tailgates NASCAR Style will be the source for tailgating fans around the country. It features regional favorites and classic grilling recipes on which Mario has put his signature spin. Included are ideas for breakfast appetizers, main courses, desserts, and drinks, all incorporating ingredients found in almost any supermarket. Written with Mario's usual wit and candor, and punctuated with racing lore, this book will allow everyone to cook great-tasting food with ease and have the folks tailgating next to you longing for leftovers.

Convenient lay-flat format

Size: 6½" X 8½", 208 pages

ONLY $19.95

Item #846

Call Toll-Free Now to Order

1-800-825-8508

Dept. WY061006

A part of the NASCAR Library Collection

NASCAR LIBRARY COLLECTION

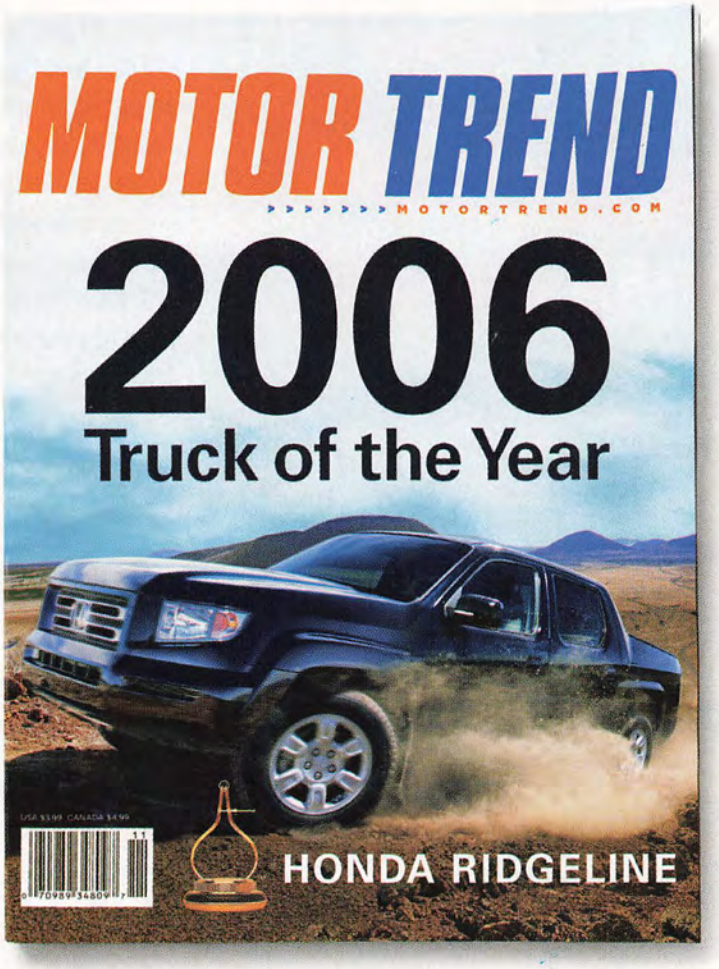
Also available at:
sportingnews.com/books

SportingNews BOOKS

To order by mail: Send check or money order to: The Sporting News, Attn: Book Dept. WY061006, P.O. Box 11229, Des Moines, IA 50340. Or fax your order to 515-699-3738 Dept. WY061006. **Shipping and handling:** All U.S. and Canadian orders shipped via UPS or USPS. No P.O. Boxes please. **Charges:** For U.S. orders, $3.95 for first book, $1.95 for each additional book. For Canadian orders, $6.95 for first book, $1.95 for each additional book. International rates available upon request.

NASCAR and NASCAR Library Collection are registered trademarks of the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, Inc.

This is, by far, the best pickup we've ever built. As it turns out, we're not the only people who think so. *Motor Trend*® has named the Ridgeline the 2006 Truck of the Year. Most certainly because of the Ridgeline's inventive design. Unique but functional features like a lockable In-Bed Trunk,™ a 4-wheel independent suspension system and an integrated closed-box frame are welcome additions to the pickup truck category. It's all innovative stuff. Especially when you consider it's the first and only pickup we've ever built. HONDA



honda.com 1-800-33-Honda

©2006 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.